

THE LIGHT HEART
MAURICE : HEWLETT

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THE LIGHT HEART

BY
MAURICE HEWLETT



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1920

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PREFACE

OF this heroic, naked story, three fragments survive in *Origines Islandicæ*, that learned repository; but to compound one plain tale of them it has been necessary to go for the catastrophe to the Saga of King Olaf. As a result of my hunting and piecing I am able to give an orderly account of the life of a young man which, I think, justifies the title I have given it. Thormod indeed had a light heart, and a high heart. Acting upon an unwritten law, which (if it were not an instinct) must be called a moral law, inasmuch as it swayed the Northmen's nature to the very roots, he feared nothing except love, and dared everything for love's sake. Very heroic was his daring; very beautiful, to me at least, was the transfer of his allegiance from his dead friend Thorgar to the live King Olaf, made lightheartedly upon a moment's impulse, but when made, made for life. If I can claim anything for myself as the interpreter

to modern readers of a bygone day, it is to have brought up from the depths of an old tale this example of swift and final self-surrender in obedience to an intuition; not merely to have handed it on, but to have revealed it.

It is by such facts as those that Thormod must be adjudged poet, for of the two poems by which he obtained his recognition nothing survives. I don't regret the lay which earned him his title of Coalbrow's Poet, because it is pretty clear that he did not take Coalbrow seriously. We may infer from that the nature of the poem. That cannot be a very sincere utterance which can be improvised into an address to another person. A poem of conceits, I take it to have been, not unlike the affair which called it forth. Thormod was no hand with women; the story puts that beyond doubt. They were his pastime; he gave his fancy to them for a while, reserving his heart for men. On that account his lament for Thorgar must be reckoned a real loss to Icelandic literature. It would have been a great thing to have had it beside David's for Jonathan, Milton's for Edward King; beside *Adonais*

too, and *In Memoriam*. It has gone, however, and it was not for me to dare a substitute. In my version of Kormak's Saga, where I paraphrased many of the hero's poems, I had in any case something to go upon. Here there is nothing.

In the shaping of *The Light Heart* I have had to contend with that formidable fact that the story splits in two in the middle. It has two endings—the consummation of the vengeance for Thorgar, and that of the second love-affair of Thormod's life. There is no coherence possible between these two parts except such as may be gained from the nature of the hero of both. To my mind a good deal can be gained that way; and I believe that the title I have bestowed upon the book, which makes Thormod the subject of it rather than Thormod's deeds, is justified on that ground alone, if on no other. Every story which is worth the name, which is not a mere anecdote, or string of anecdotes, but has a reasonable soul in human words subsisting, embodies either a moral idea or a personality.

You may write round either without denying yourself the help of the other; but one or the other

will be substance, one or the other accident. Thus the *Iliad* is written about an idea, which character subserves; but the *Odyssey* is written about a character, and the idea in it is the idea of Odysseus. So it is with the Sagas of Iceland. *Njala*, which, like *Thormod*, breaks into two parts, is composed round about ideas, to which Gunnar of Lithaid and Njal himself are subject. But *Thormod* has character for its core, and the moral idea of sworn brotherhood and its implications, which only lasts halfway through the piece, seems to me to be tacked on to the personality of the hero. The reader who wishes to satisfy himself that I am right about all this, should compare the treatment of a blood-feud here with that of the Saga of Gisli Surssan, which I have paraphrased as *The Outlaw*.

I have called *The Light Heart* a story both heroic and naked, and might say a word about the second of those epithets. Romantic literature has always concerned itself with clothes, that is, atmosphere; but it is a foolish criticism which tries to confine classicism and romanticism within enclosing dates. The *Iliad* has practically no atmos-

phere, the *Odyssey* has a great deal. I don't know of any Saga which can properly be called romantic; yet out of the same country and age comes a lay like *Halgi and Sigrim*, which is drenched in atmospheric glamour. The difference is by no means one of means alone; it is obvious that the writer of the Saga and poet of the lay are looking at their matter through different eyes. The Saga-man never for a moment forgot that he was an historian. He was telling of real people to their descendants of a few generations; he was telling of them within a few miles of where the deeds he related actually occurred. He was telling a plain tale to men who would have been scandalised by any other. The things laid to his heroes would have been done in the same fashion by his hearers; it would have outraged their sensibilities to have enhanced such deeds by rhetoric, just as it would have been ridiculous in him to have described picturesquely what they knew as well as, or better than, he did. But scene-painting is a modern embellishment of literature, and I have been careful to avoid anything more than an indication of the landscape in which, for instance,

the desperate dealings of Thormod with his fellow-creatures were enacted.

Atmosphere then, landscape-painting, purple shreds and patches, are not in my original, nor to be looked for here. But the nakedness of the Sagas goes far beyond those accessories of tale-telling, to such lengths indeed that I have painted by the roadside. They omit, as I have found, things which are essential to a tale for modern understanding; and the chief of these things is human nature. The secret springs of conduct—instinct, emotion, passion—are scarcely hinted at. Character itself must be inferred. All this is too excellent and wonderful for me. As I have said once before, the Sagas are of all classics “the most unapproachable.” “Their frugality freezes the soul; they are laconic to baldness.” Finally, I have admitted that “the starkness of the Sagas shocks me.” It can only be some such astringency in them which has denied them popularity in such a nation as ours which worships heroism, as well it may, and extremely dislikes any display of it. It is that astringency which I have been at pains

to soften by a few lines of dialogue, by an aside of my own, by a comment here and there, or by a deliberate evocation of character-outline. One has to create the illusion of reality when one is addressing an audience to whom the people of the tale and their environment alike are strange and uncouth. Neither a nod nor a wink is any encouragement to a blind horse; but an apple at his nose, or an ashplant on his quarters may do much for him. Certainly it is not the fault of my readers if they are blind to the merits of the Sagas, as they may be extracted from *Origines Islandicæ*. Those learned tomes were not printed for the likes of them. Very gingerly and with all due respect, therefore, I have applied encouragement or stimulus as the case may be, and seemed to require; but I hope I have in no case done violence either to the person of my reader, or the dignity of my original. I have never presumed to invent incident—that be far from me. On the other hand, I have taken leave to account for it. Nothing that I could have done would have added a cubit to the stature of Saint Olaf, or embellished the swift and salient

outline of young Thormod. It has rather been a case of fitting myself to see them as the Saga-man showed them to his kindred. If in so doing I have cleared other English eyes, why, then I have done something.

*Broadchalke,
October 11, 1919.*

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THE LIGHT HEART



I

THORMOD was the name of a man known afterwards as Coalbrow's Poet, though nobody had known that he was a poet until he met with Coalbrow, and least of all had he known it himself. But from what I can find out about him his poetry was in him from the beginning. He had the poet's way of thinking rather than of doing, that knack of working out the ways of a deed so fully in the mind that when the time comes to do it, it seems already done, and done with: wherefore you simply leave it undone. Another trick he had, which betrays his quality. He always viewed himself and his actions, himself with his friends, or with his family, as if his thinking self were no part of himself. He was intensely curious about his own actions, and for ever asking his great friend Thorgar how the things they did together struck him, so that he himself might get a clearer view of them,

or another view. And one more thing about him, to my mind very significantly his quality. He would never, for his life, surprise Thorgar, come upon him unawares. Sooner than do that he would not see him at all; and as he saw him nearly every day, he was often at great pains to warn him of the exact time of his approach. If everything else failed he would stand well out of sight, and shout, "Ho, Thorgar!" until he heard the answer come back which he could recognize as Thorgar's voice. He found himself out in this queer trick one day by accident, and thereafter never rested till he had got to the bottom of it. He was afraid that Thorgar might be different; he was afraid that he might catch Thorgar doing something, or looking like something, which would prove that he had never known Thorgar—that is, the real Thorgar; for he felt sure that the real *you* was only visible when you were alone, or believed yourself so. Now he loved Thorgar so much, and knew that he did, saw himself daily, hourly, loving Thorgar so utterly that he simply dared not risk the chance of surprising a different Thorgar. When

he knew all this he told Thorgar about it, of course. And Thorgar laughed.

"I thought you were a queer fish," he said, "but not that you were so queer as that."

Thormod said, "You surely see what I am afraid of—and why I am afraid of it?"

"But I do not," said Thorgar. Thormod frowned.

"You see," he said, "you are my greatest friend."

"Granted."

"You are only my friend because I love what you are."

"Well——?"

"Well—but if you were different I might not love you at all."

Thorgar's eyes flashed. He had got hold of something at last. "Yes—but you might, on the other hand, love me more." And he insisted upon arguing about that, which to Thormod's mind had nothing whatever to do with it. So Thormod had to give up talking about it at all, but did not cease giving notice of his approach. So it happened that

he met, quite by accident, with the happiest moment of his life, a moment which he never forgot.

Thormod was perhaps a year older than Thorgar; but Thorgar took the lead in most of their escapades from the time when they were boys until the age of manhood. After that Thormod's mind outran Thorgar's and dominated it. They were much of a height, but Thorgar was the stouter, and in constitution the tougher of them. In looks they were very different. Thorgar had a high colour, straight, dense brown hair, blue eyes. He was not very good-looking, for his teeth showed too much; he was rough and graceless; he had no pity; but he was quite without fear. Thormod was all black and white. He had black and curly hair, black eyes, or rather yellow eyes, which looked black when the pupils dilated, as they always did in certain lights. He was often pale in the face, sometimes burnt brown by the sun, but never red. He had a good straight nose, a sharp chin with a dimple in it, a good mouth with very red lips. When he smiled few girls could resist him. He stammered a little—and girls liked that too. He did not find

out his powers with women until he was eighteen or thereabouts, but when he did he made as much use of them as his countryside afforded, and began to take himself seriously as a lover. Presently he found that he was taking himself seriously every time he met with an attractive girl, and from that time on he was less serious. It struck him as comical, and therefore he ceased to consider himself in love; but he did not by any means cease to enjoy girls' society.

The truth was, he told himself, his friendship with Thorgar was too serious a matter to allow any room for a great love-affair. That, in all its phases, absorbed him. He took it much harder than Thorgar did; but Thorgar was as clear as water in summer, and always the same—therefore there was no risk of any of the ridiculous misunderstandings, tiffs, jealousies, suspicions which are always heading up love-affairs with girls—damming them like brooks, until the current swells over the obstruction and runs boiling and foaming for a time, carrying everything before it. That was the glory of friendship; it was a state of peace and trust.

But he did not realise how intensely he loved Thorgar until he ran the risk of losing him altogether.

That happened when he was twenty years old, and Thorgar, maybe, nineteen. It was high summer, and they had gone off together to the cliffs at the Horn to get angelica. The pipy stalks of the plant make a good sweetmeat, and the best ones come from the Horn where the cliffs are sheer over the sea: a wild and dangerous place, the extreme north-west of Iceland. Below the edge of the cliff, a man's height down, there was a grassy shelf where the angelica grew finest. Thorgar let himself down to that dangerous place, and what he cut of the stuff he passed up to Thormod on the brink.

Thormod, with an armful, was away for a few minutes, bearing it out of the wind to the shelter where they had left their cloaks and weapons. While he was away the scree on which the angelica grew gave way under Thorgar, who slipped off the shelf and, had he not caught hold of a plant close to the root, he must have dropped to the sea, some sixty fathoms below him. There he hung, while

Thormod, in no sort of hurry, sat himself down on the cliff, clasped his hands about his shins and watched the wheeling birds or the seals far off on the rocks, or the weather. By and by, without stirring from his place, he called out to his friend, "Ho, there—are you never coming? You must have enough by now."

Thorgar's voice sounded far and faint. "I guess I shall have enough by the time I have pulled this one up."

Thormod did not hear what he said, though he heard him speak. He got up slowly and went to the edge to look over. Then he saw Thorgar's hand, and nothing else of him. His first shock was that he was seeing Thorgar unawares, and the concern of that occupied him for a full minute. Then, all at once, he saw his instant danger, and grew grey in the face.

In a moment he had dropped over the edge on to the shelf, threw himself flat and caught Thorgar by the wrist. As he hauled him up the angelica root broke away from the scree. He brought him safely to bank, however, and sat down to recover

himself. He was still grey-faced, and trembling; but Thorgar was not in any respect moved by his experience. Thormod could not speak for some time. Then he said, "What were you thinking of when I saw your hand, and nothing else of you?"

Thorgar said, "I don't know when you did see my hand."

"I saw it a minute before I caught hold of you."

"Oh—well, I expect I was wondering how long it would be before the root came away."

"Were you not thinking, where shall I be afterwards?"

"No, indeed."

"Don't you want to know that?"

"No. It is nothing to me."

"It is much to me," Thormod said; "but I never thought about it till I saw your hand."

On the way home Thormod proposed that they should swear that either of them should avenge the death of the other; and Thorgar agreed. They swore it with lifted hands, and afterwards shook hands upon it. They were Christian in Iceland

at the time, but only newly so, and not very much so. They were Christian enough, however, to forbear any more ceremony than they made. There should have been a turf-girdle lifted, under which they should have crawled. They should have each let blood from the arm, and mixed it with the earth under the turf-girdle. But those things were left out when they swore their friendship.

It is not certain how far Thorgar was playing at a heathen pact, how far he merely lent himself to Thormod's mood, as he thought it. But he was wrong there. It was no mood of Thormod's at all, but an outcome of his whole nature. It was a dedication of his life to an idea.

II

THESE two young men, perfectly happy in themselves and in each other, were not liked in their country. It was a country where life was hard, where winter was long and summer short, where stormy weather for weeks together stopped the fishing, where you might be at your wits' end how to keep the stock alive until the grass began to grow. But Thorgar and Thormod had no heed for all this. They did very little work, and (as it seemed) could only be amused if their neighbours did as little.

And they were high-spirited, and Thorgar at least inclined to be quarrelsome. He was known to have killed his man—at a horse-fight it had been done, in a sudden tempest of rage. He had rushed at him, with a great stone in both his hands, lifted it and brought it down on the top of his head. There had been a great stir, although the man was

only a thrall. His father had paid weregild, and the thing had quieted down. Thorgar had gone south for a season, and Thormod with him. They had stayed with a man called Thorgils at Reek-hill; those two with a huge man of great fame, Grette by name, Grette the Strong. There had been fine doings all the winter they were there—games, hunting, battles on the ice and what-not. Thormod and Thorgar together were almost a match for Grette. Thorgils was fond of talking about it afterwards. He was accustomed to say that he had housed that winter the three bravest men in all Iceland; but once, when he had said it, he was challenged. Did they then fear nothing? Why, yes, he said, two of them did. Grette, he said, was afraid of the dark, and Thormod was afraid of God; but as for Thorgar, there was nothing here or elsewhere that he was afraid of; and “I never saw him show a sign of fear at any sudden danger he might fall in with.”

Thorgar was clear about the future. He would sail the seas, visit King Olaf, and if there was fighting to be done, he would fight. When they got

upon this topic Thormod always felt a black humour seize upon him. He too desired to travel, but fighting made no call for his ears. He was the happier of the two in the friendship. He often thought about it, and whenever he did he felt his heart beat the faster. Thorgar took it for granted, and did not think about it at all. Nor did it sway his ambition, nor interfere with his plans. But it coloured the whole of Thormod's outlook; he would not consider of a life in which it did not take the chief part. So he did not care to talk of the future for fear that Thorgar should make too free. But Thorgar made very free, and as he grew stronger and older would always discuss the future. The more he talked the grimmer grew Thormod; and it did not make him the less grim that he knew he was dishonouring friendship by treating it with the petulance of a love-affair. That knowledge made him cross. He said to himself, A friendship that is in danger is a friendship lost already. In a sort of sense, then, he was prepared for what was coming.

I don't know whether Thorgar made any prepa-

rations for going abroad, or whether he acted on impulse. If it came to him suddenly, it came on the doing of Thormod, who, having conceived the possibility, was impatient until he knew the worst. What exactly happened was this. The pair of them were riding one day in early summer eastwards along Gilsfirth, which is the extremity of Broadfirth. They rode on the shore below the cliffs, and were in a hurry to pass the Drifta, which is a great headland and impassable at high water, before the tide caught them. Thorgar was in high spirits, put his horse to a gallop, and outdistanced his friend. Presently he reined up and looked back, flushed and laughing, while Thormod came up with him. Then they rode on together, Thormod a little put out by the bustle and his beating. Thorgar said, "I beat you fairly, yet the pace you made would have foundered anybody else."

Thormod said nothing, but Thorgar went on. "Now I should like to know if there are two others the like of us, young men, sworn brothers, in all Iceland. What do you say?"

Thormod said, "Why not? Iceland is a large

country. Look far enough into it and you will find all sorts."

"Never," cried Thorgar. "Not in all Iceland, at least. Norway, Denmark, I don't say—but not Iceland." Then he was quiet, looking at the rising tide, which was already up to the horses' knees. They were close to the cliff by now, and could see the breaking waves lipping at the rocks.

"Now tell me this," he said, looking saucily at Thormod, who was frowning; "tell me this. If you and I were put to it, which of us do you think would come off the better man?"

It was an unwise question, because he had just outpaced his friend. Thormod grew angry. "I don't know," he said hotly, "but I will tell you what I do know, that your question breaks up our ride together."

Thorgar, who was ahead again, with the water over his knees and up to his horse's shoulder, laughed and waved his hand, without looking back. Thormod had reined up and was watching him. Before he rounded the cliff Thorgar looked back.

"Come on, man," he called out. "You must swim for it."

Thormod heard him. "I am not coming," he shouted. "Farewell and good fortune!" Then he turned and rode west, and on to Bathbow, where his father lived. He did not know then that he should never see Thorgar again, but as winter succeeded winter without news, he became reconciled to it. It was two years certainly before he heard from some seafarer that Thorgar had gone abroad.

By that time he was involved in other affairs, and his friendship of twenty years had taken the place of a sacred memory. He never forgot Thorgar, and had no bitterness at all in his memories of him. It all showed clear and beautiful and far-off, like an island in the sea full in the sun, when the mainland is heavy with cloud and driving rain. There was no fear that he would ever fail in his oath. In fact, it was always before him, like a career. He had no other in prospect, and it seemed to him as good as any. But it did not prevent him from amusing himself. He fell more than usually in love, and found out that he was a poet.

III

BUT I must deal first with Thorgar, who held on his way along Gilsfirth, making his road into Sowerby. It was in Swinedale down there that he expected to come up with some friends of his, Luge and Thorgils, who, with a company, were meaning to take ship in Midfirth. That had been the intention also of Thormod.

He rode on briskly to the head of the firth, then up a narrow dale and out into the open country, without seeing anything of the men he was looking for; and presently he came to a homestead called Marswell, where meadows sloped down to a river, and he could see a man working his way up to the house with a load of rushes on his back. That man's name was Torve, but Thorgar neither knew nor cared what his name was. He got within hailing distance across the river and shouted to him. No answer. He trotted forward, still calling; he

called several times, but had no answer. The fact was that Torve didn't hear him. The wind was pretty fresh and whistling in the rushes on his back. But again Thorgar neither knew nor cared. He was very angry, and to go on shouting, as he did, made him furious. He spurred forward in a fume, crossed the river, overtook Torve, and drove his spear clean through his back. The man dropped in a heap, with the rushes all over his head. Thorgar rode on along the river.

That was the kind of young man he was, careless of his own life and careless of other men's. He thought no more of Torve at all, being set on finding his friends. It was well past noon when he came up with them, and told them what a chase they had led him. "Why," he said, "I had to kill a man before I could get at you." They stared at him, and then it all came out. He had no praise from them for the deed; he found them, on the contrary, cool with him, got in a pet again and refused to stop at Horneddale, where Luge and Thorgils stayed to dine. He would wait for them at Borgfirth, he said, and rode on.

But his day's work was by no means over with the slaying of Torve. He must have been in a mad mood, since this is what he did. He reached a place called Sharpfell, with a good homestead, and the men, just off work, standing about the doors. He had to cross two or three fields to reach the track which led past the house, and there, in the last of them, he saw two men talking by a turf wall—one was sitting on the wall, the other, with his crook between his knees, was sitting on his heels, leaning his head forward and looking at the ground. Thorgar passed quite close to him with an axe swinging loosely in his hand. As he went by, without thinking what he was doing, he swung up the axe and let it fall on the back of the man's neck. It cut like a razor, took the head clean off. All the men stared at him, too much astonished to cry out. Thorgar rode on his way and passed out of sight: nobody came after him.

But by the time Luge and the other man came on the household at Sharpfell had collected its wits and was ready for them. Luge, in perfect inno-

cence, asked, had they seen a horseman go by, and described Thorgar. "Is he a friend of yours?" "He is." "Then we will trouble you with a deed of his." Whereupon they displayed the headless corpse of the shepherd. No help, they must pay weregild—and so they did, very unwillingly, and then they rode on their way to Borgfirth.

There, on the hard, was Thorgar, all his ill-humour blown away, who hailed them cheerfully. "Well met," he said, "but you ride slowly."

Luge and Thorgils looked at each other. "Ah," said Luge, "and perhaps if you were slower in your deeds you would be none the worse."

"As for the speed we make," Thorgils said, "that is as may be. I suppose you haven't reckoned the time we may have spent in repairing your mischiefs."

At first Thorgar honestly did not know what all this implied. He knit his brows over it and gazed darkly from under them at the two arrivals.

Then his face cleared. "Ah, you came by Marswell? Now I understand you."

He looked rather serious. "It must be confessed I did thoughtlessly up there."

"Thoughtless enough—and heartless enough," said Luge. "What grudge did you owe the man?"

"None at all—none at all."

"Then," said Luge, "I don't know what to say to you."

"I don't think you will understand me," Thorgar said. "It is the truth that I had nothing against him. But as I was passing him close, his head was stretched out in such a way that it was difficult to resist a cut at it. The axe, do you see, was swinging in my hand. And it sliced him like a turnip. But it was a thoughtless act."

"It was a manslaughter for which we have been compelled to pay handsomely," Thorgils told him.

"I pay, I pay," says Thorgar.

"Why, yes," Thorgar said, "you pay, no doubt. But are you always so handy with your steel?"

“No, no,” said Thorgar.

“It is to be hoped not. On board ship, you must know, we stand thick between decks.”

“You are very right,” said Thorgar. “I will take care.”

That evening they went on board, and betimes they up-anchor and rowed out of the firth.

IV

THERE is but little more to be told of Thorgar, the manner of whose death, like the fact of it, was not known for many years. The ship made a long voyage before they saw land; and when they saw it, and knew it for Ireland, they were in two minds whether to go ashore or not. The Icelanders were not loved in Ireland, and as Luge wished to trade and had no desire either to kill or be killed, he gave orders that they should cast anchor out of bow shot from the land, and hide a while before they manned the boat. They could see a dense company awaiting them, and a company which was constantly increasing, and a company which was heavily armed. They saw spears in such a number that they looked like a wood of young trees. But no boats put off, and they were too far out for a shore attack. Nevertheless, Luge did not like the look of things, and soon made up his mind

that nothing could be done there. Thorgar was on fire to make a landing, but the other two were afraid of him, and with reason. After waiting for a fair wind, they sailed directly they got it, and made a good landing in England, where they were well received. King Cnut of Denmark was king of that country, and welcomed them. From thence, having letters from the King, they went to Denmark, wintered there, and then separated. Luge and Thorgils went home, but Thorgar took ship with some merchants of his new acquaintance, and went to Norway.

There, on all hands, he heard such things of King Olaf that he determined to see him. Olaf was at Trondjem, sitting in his hall with his chiefs about him, when Thorgar came in. He looked very fine, having grown a full beard, having a goodly crimson cloak, a winged casque in his hand, and his weapons clanging about him as he moved.

He walked up to the hall and greeted the King.

“You speak me fairly,” says Olaf, “and I take it fairly. But I must know who greets me. Who are you, and whence are you?”

"I am from Iceland," he said, "and my name Thorgar."

The King looked more sharply at him. There were very few men of any note in the world whom he did not know. "Are you Thorgar Hawarson?"

Thorgar said, "That is who I am."

Olaf kept his eyes upon him. "I have heard of you, and am glad to see you. You are a fine man, and have the air of a man. You have done some notable deeds, they tell me, and I hope you will do some more. But you must not look to come off unscathed in all things—and indeed I don't see that fortune for you."

Thorgar said that he had learned to take things as they came. "At this moment," he said, "I think well of my fortune."

Olaf was drawn to him, and made up his mind quickly, as he always did. "If you will stay with me," he said, "you will be welcome, and I desire your better acquaintance. I don't make many mistakes in the company I keep."

Thorgar said, "I accept that offer."

There he stayed, it is said, for a year or more, high in honour with King Olaf. And then came the end of him. The King's affairs in Greenland called for ships and armed men. Thorgar was made chief of a company. He went, and was swallowed up in that land of fog and storm. Report came long afterwards to Olaf in Norway that he had been slain by one Thorgrim Trolle, but nothing of the manner of his death. Later still, the news reached his friend Thormod at Bathbow.

V

WHEN Thormod had reconciled himself to the loss of his friend, and was content to keep him as a beautiful memory, he began to cast about for a more active occupation—not for his body, for he never wanted that, but for his mind. He turned over the young men of his acquaintance, and had no interest in any of them. Then he realised that the pursuits, desperate enough as some of them were, which he had shared with Thorgar had only pleased him because they pleased Thorgar. He did not care for horse-fighting in itself, or for football upon the ice; he did not wish to drink or be drunk; he did not want to fight with any one or to draw blood. He knew that he was unlike other young men, but did not at all know why. What he liked best of all was to see a beautiful thing, and sit still and look at it—and think about it. Now it happened that there was a beautiful thing

near at hand; so he got into the way of going to look at it. It was a young girl called Thordis, about fifteen years old, the only daughter of Grima, the widow, who lived at Augre—a place close by the water of Icefirth.

Grima was rather old to have a child of that age, very well off, and supposed to be wise. That means to say that she knew things unlawful—witchcraft, spædom and suchlike. She was always very pleasant to Thormod when he came; and Thordis, her girl, was more than that.

She was a very good-looking girl, tall and beautifully formed, with a delicate colour and bright eyes. She knew that Thormod admired her, which enhanced her good looks; and as she trusted him the two became more than friendly. She used to kiss him when it grew dusk, but never in the daylight; so Thormod got into the habit of coming rather late and staying till nightfall. He had plenty to say to her, and she was a good listener. They used to sit together in the summer twilight and watch the smooth-flowing water of the firth, while Thormod would tell her his fancies about every-

thing in the world in one long stream of murmur. Grima would be mostly indoors at such times; but she knew pretty well what was going on, and thought no harm so long as nobody else did.

But the worst of it was, as always happens, the neighbours, who knew much less than Grima did, as a consequence thought much more. After the first winter of this pleasant intercourse, when the open weather began, and the long days, and Thormod continued his visits to Augre, the people of that countryside began to whisper, to nod, wink and talk. Then presently something of all this drifted past Grima's ears; she heard it and was offended. As their saying went, Thormod was beguiling her daughter, than which nothing more harmful could be said of any girl.

So by and by Grima, choosing her time, had a word or two with Thormod. "I have had words come by me," she said, "that you are beguiling my Thordis. That miscontents me, because you know as well as I do that a girl's person is like a polished mirror. Breathe upon it and she is tar-

nished. Young men will not ask for a girl whose fame is spotted."

Thormod was troubled. "There is no harm between us, mother," he said. "We like each other well—but not in that way."

"If I had thought there was harm in it you would not be listening to me now," said Grima. "I like you well myself, and think that you two are happy together. But there can only be one end to such companionships. If you choose to ask me for her I shall give her to you. So it is in your choice."

Now Thormod looked rather foolish. He did not find any words for some time, but then he thanked Grima for her kindness. "You treat me very friendly," he said, "and I shall treasure your speeches. But I told you just now that we had no thought of setting up house. I haven't said a word of it to Thordis—I am not a marrying man myself, so far as I see. If I were such, be sure I should look for no better wife than Thordis. But that will not be the end of our friendship."

Grima looked at him, her lips pressed together. "Oh, well——" she said.

"Well?" said Thormod.

"I can't have her a byword."

Thormod rose to his feet, stayed irresolute for a little, then shrugged, threw up his head, wished her good day, and walked out of the house. He saw Thordis in the cowhouse, and waved his hand to her. She stood there looking after him; but he did not turn his head. He kept away for the rest of the summer.

But when the winter dark began he was horribly hipped at home, and began to think longingly of Augre and Thordis's kisses. The bay froze hard and gave him a short cut; he did not attempt to resist his desires. He was rather sheepish facing Grima again, but she was pleasant enough to him, thinking that perhaps he had thought it over and found himself more of a marrying man than he had believed. "If he can't get her society any other way, he will have it that way." That was what she thought. There was no doubt of the welcome he had from Thordis at least. She was

shy, but it made her kisses all the sweeter when they came, to have to beg for them. Very soon he came daily and went away nightly. Then gossip began again. Grima bore it as long as she could, and then asked Thormod plainly to cease his visits. Thormod laughed, said he would be more careful, and wasn't so. And then Grima grew angry.

She kept a thrall, Colbac by name, a big and strong fellow. One afternoon, while Thormod and Thordis were in the house together, Grima went out into the byre and found Colbac at work. She beckoned him with her forefinger, then put it to her lips. He followed her into the house, and found her groping in a great coffer that stood there. She brought out presently some skeins of what looked like waxed silk, and holding them in her two hands, said, "Hold up your arms that I may make you invisible." He did as she bade him, and she wound the skeins round and round his body underneath his outer coat, from the armpits well down to the buttocks. "Nothing will bite you now," she said. Then she brought a short, straight two-edged sword out of her coffer. "Take

this," she said; "better not go unarmed." She looked up at the sky and snuffed about. "There is a thaw coming, but the bay will hold to-night. Be wary; you will take no harm." That was all she said.

After supper, when Thormod got up to go home, Thordis went to the door with him. She put her hand on his shoulder, and said, "I want to ask you something."

"It is yours," said Thormod.

"Don't cross the bay to-night, then. Take the upper road above Augreswick, and then the track over the brae to Bathbow. Will you promise me?"

"Why do you want me to do that?" he asked her.

"Oh," she said, "the ice may not be safe—who knows? I don't want to think of any harm coming to you."

"No harm will come to me," said Thormod. "The ice will bear for another day and night."

Thordis took her hand away. "How many favours do I ask of you that you grudge me this one?"

Thormod said immediately, "Put your hand where it was, and I'll grant you anything." She did; and then she kissed him, and he left her.

When he was a little of his way he thought that after all he would go over the ice. It was much shorter, and he could keep along the edge for a good distance, and then make a rush. So he took his usual course. When he came to the sheep-cote which stood down by the water, and was in the act of passing it, a man jumped out and cut at him. He felt a sting upon his right upper arm, felt the blood flow freely, and found that he had no power in it. He dropped his shield, pulled out his sword with his left hand and attacked his assailant, who only defended himself and hit him no more. Thormod fought fiercely and hit the man many times, but without effect. He felt that the sword would not bite, and presently gave over, and stood looking at the shrouded form against him. Colbac it was, who then said, "I have you now, Thormod—but enough done." He turned and faded into the night. Thormod felt faint and sick, but managed somehow to tie up his arm with the

only rag he had to spare, namely, his linen drawers. When he reached home he could hardly speak for exhaustion, and neither eat nor drink. The maid who had been waiting for him called up his father, and between them they put him to bed. He was in a fever, and light-headed.

VI

THORMOD may have been a bad subject, but at any rate he was very ill, and never recovered the use of his right arm. The power in it was gone. He became expert with his left, however, and was nearly the same fine swimmer he had always been—but that was much later. There was no swimming for him the summer following Colbac's onslaught. Any ideas that he may have had of swimming over the firth to see Thordis were far from him at that time—as, indeed, she herself was. He neither thought of her with regret nor cherished any grudge. He laughed at his father when he spoke of vengeance. "Vengeance for what?" he said. "Had she not a right to rid her of a nuisance? That was what I proved to her."

Said his father, "You could have wed your lady for a nod."

"That nod would have cost me more than a

slack arm," Thormod said. "I shall never marry Thordis."

When his health was better he began to chafe at his home-staying, and made many plans. But they came to nothing, and presently he fell in with a plan of his father's, which was that he should go out to the fishing on the Banks beyond Bolewick. "Why not?" he said, when it was proposed; and off he went.

They sailed out of Icefirth on a fair wind, and it looked like a good passage; but when they were off Ernedale it shifted and blew in their teeth. As it looked like holding, they cast anchor as close inshore as they could get, landed and pitched a tent. Thormod took to wandering over the country, and so wandered into a new distraction.

A homestead stood in a snug valley which ran out of Ernedale. A woman named Catla held it, with her daughter Thorbeorg, and her son, called Glum. Thorbeorg was a pretty girl, not at all like Thordis, for she was little, and had a high colour, and with very blue eyes had hair as black as night. Her eyebrows, for which she was famous, perfect

half-circles, deeply black, gave her the nickname of Coalbrow. She was a merry-hearted girl, and gave herself no airs. Everybody liked her.

Into that house, where she and her mother were, Thormod walked one day, and stood smiling in his queer way, waiting for a welcome. And he got it. Catla, still a young woman, was glad to see him, or any one in that lonely country, and when she heard his name she nodded and smiled at it. "We have often heard of you," she said, "and will make you welcome." He and Thorbeorg looked at each other more than once, and liked what they saw. Thormod had a good way with women, for he treated them as equals, which all poets do not, and took pains to be at ease and set them so. He soon had Thorbeorg talking to him as freely as her mother; so there he stayed all day.

He walked back over the fell to his tent happier than he had been for a long while. Thorbeorg moved him as Thordis had never done. It was not that she was more beautiful—for she was not—but that there was that about her which charmed him more. As he went he began to make up sen-

tences about her, to string them together into a kind of pattern. Before he was in the tent he had made a poem. He was too excited to sleep; the moon was up and throwing a golden pathway over the firth. He walked about, declaiming his verses and thinking about Coalbrow. That name attracted him, too. It was a rich and strong name. Certainly he had never seen anything like her eyebrows—hoops of jet, black bows over dark-blue; arches of cloud over the sea. He walked fiercely about, thinking of Coalbrow and her hoops of jet. She was a sweet and lovely person whom it was happiness to flatter excessively. He would like to say of her something never said about a girl before. Arches in the storm-cloud revealing the dark-blue sea—or if her eyes were two lakes, were not her brows like the black pines arched above them? They were like everything where deep blue and black met and enhanced each other. But then he thought that if he were to make a great poem about Coalbrow he must give time to it. “I see my way—I see my way—but you must give me time, you beautiful creature.” He turned to where the house

was which held her sleeping, and her hooped brows—and spoke to her softly on the wind. “Now I shall go in and sleep, and dream about you, Coalbrow.”

Not surprising that he went out to the farm again, and soon was there every day. He read his verses to Thorbeorg, and some of them to her mother. They thought this fine fun. Glum, the son of the house, was away from home; there was no other man in the house but the servants. Catla presently proposed that Thormod should stay with them altogether, and let his mates go fishing alone. That was arranged, and he lived as a son of the family for the better part of a month.

In the course of that he finished his poem about Thorbeorg's coalbrows, and not only read it to her, but declaimed it to company. It was much admired, and once at a feast where he delivered it, and Coalbrow herself sat demure to hear it, and to be marked of all, Catla her mother took a fine ring off her finger, and put it upon Thormod's finger before the assembled guests. “I give you this for your verses,” she said, “which do honour

to my daughter and to me. And you shall be known far and wide as Coalbrow's poet, whereby my girl will be remembered when men speak of you."

Thormod took the gift and the name with becoming modesty. He was proud of them and proud to be accepted as Thorbeorg's lover. Indeed, he firmly believed himself to be in love with her, but we may suppose that his chief pride lay in the ability he had shown to pay her a magnificent and unexpected compliment.

But when his men came back from the fishing it was necessary to say good-bye. His parting with Thorbeorg was tender, and took a long time. She had a sweet nature and did not seek to hide her unhappiness, or her belief in him. He held her fondly and believed in himself as he swore that he loved her. From her he turned to her mother. "You have been mother to me, who have no mother at home. Do you believe in me also, as Coalbrow does?"

He had Thorbeorg's hand as he spoke, and there were tears in his eyes.

“Come back to us,” Catla said. “Never pass by this house as if it held strangers.”

“Trust me,” said Thormod, and as he said it he trusted in himself. And then he turned away, and Thorbeorg cried with her face on her mother’s shoulder.

VII

FOR a good while after reaching home he thought tenderly of Coalbrow, and at the turning over of the name had a vision of her glowing face, deep-blue eyes and arched eyebrows. But if he had known as much about love as he thought he did he would have known that it is a bad sign when you can recall clearly the face of the beloved. The greater your longing the more blurred is the image, hidden up as it were in the mists of desire. But Thormod knew nothing about all that, and as long as the image of Thorbeorg pleased him so long did he feel himself in love with her.

By and by he mostly forgot Thorbeorg, and as it was then the winter, with the firth icebound, it was natural that he should remember a short cut to Augre, and who, and what, lay at the end of it. To take the way was also natural; and he did take it, with only one thought for Colbac's am-

bush by the sheepfold, and with not more than three thoughts of Thorbeorg in Ernedale. However, he was to have more thoughts of her before he was out of Augre.

Grima received him well, though not without a backward hint or two. "So you come to see us again! And bringing peace, I hope, with you."

"Oh, peace!" says Thormod. "I am not one to store things in the mind."

"We are not all masters of the mind," said Grima; "but there should be no feud between us." She gave him to drink, and sat talking with him of indifferent things; then presently Thordis came in, with a heightened colour, and a certain stiffness. Thormod thought her much more beautiful than Thorbeorg, and she certainly was, though not so charming. When Grima left them together he did his best to restore the old footing, but found that Grima had been right in saying that we are not all masters of the mind.

Thordis was not to be drawn so easily. She had very little to say, and did not appear interested

in what Thormod had to tell her. That nettled him.

"You are changed a good deal," he said. "Now if I bear no grudge for what happened on my last visit, I cannot think that you need."

Thordis' eyes flashed.

"Perhaps you forget that it was not my fault that anything happened to you. Forgetting seems to come easy."

"What do you mean by that?" said Thormod.

"I mean that you forgot my prayer to you to take the long road that night," said she.

"I acknowledge that I disobeyed you," he told her, "but not because I forgot what you said. I found the ice would carry me, so I took that road. It would have been well for me if I had kept faith."

"To keep faith is always well," said Thordis drily; "but that does not come easily to you, I understand."

At first he was puzzled. "What is this?"

"I hear of you as a poet," said Thordis. "I hear of you as a lover."

"Do you say I am a poet?"

"No, indeed."

"Do you say I am a lover?"

"Nay, that is what you say of yourself."

"When have I said so? Where have I said so?"

"In the poem which you made to Thorbeorg Coalbrow in Ernedale," said Thordis.

There, then, he had it, and he did on the spot what I suppose every man would have done—that is, lied.

He said very quietly, and without moving from his place by the board, "That is quite untrue, as you put it. It is true that I made a poem in Ernedale, and that Thorbeorg heard it, for I spoke it to her. But the poem was about yourself, though she may not have known that. If a man is to write a poem about a lady he will write the more strongly about her when he is face to face with another whose beauty and conversation make to shine by contrast those of the woman of his love. Now I can recite you the poem which I made, if you choose to hear it. And I will write it down for you, if you care to have it." Then he looked

straight at Thordis and saw the cloud of doubt lift a little from her fine eyes.

She avoided his bold gaze, and looked down at her hands in her lap. Presently she said that she should like to hear the poem.

Thormod began to speak the Coalbrow poem, and as he went on, so struck was he with desire of Thordis that he was fired with words, and made a new thing of it. He did not falter once, or betray himself. He felt as he went on that he was improving the poem, and attributed that entirely to the greater beauty of Thordis. She listened closely, was plainly moved by his fervour—the signs could not be mistaken; and at the end she looked up with a divine light in her eyes, and without a word gave him her hand. Thormod sprang towards her, and they kissed. He felt happy and triumphant; for he had made what was really a new poem out of one which he now thought meanly of.

But on his way home his mood changed, and he felt very badly of what he had done. "I am a dog," he said to himself, "to trick two good and

lovely girls. It is what a thrall would do." When he was at home and abed, he could not sleep, because whenever he was drowsing off, by some fate Thorbeorg or Thordis seemed to stand vividly before his eyes, and he grew hot all over. However, in the morning he felt better about it, and by dusk had but one care in the world, which was to see and be kissed by Thordis. Happy with her for a few hours, his remorse attacked him at night. Thorbeorg was always by his bedside, but not the glowing little beauty of his experience. A new Thorbeorg this was, pale and reproachful, whose black brows stared fiercely from a white face. He fought the vision desperately, and got some sleep towards morning. That went on nightly, until he became ill with want of proper rest, and gradually the conviction was forced upon him that he must confess to Thordis what he had done. Finally he knew that nothing else would satisfy his conscience or give him sleep.

He did it, and it was the hardest thing he had ever had to do. He took with him the poem he had first made about Coalbrow, and gave it to

Thordis. More than that, he forced himself to read it to her. He was so beaten down by shame that the girl could not be angry, nor even scorn him. On the contrary, she pitied him, and to his great surprise said presently that she too had something to confess.

"It cannot be worth setting by my own confession," said the unhappy Thormod.

Thordis said, "It is bad, because it will make you unhappy, but it was not a wilful fault of mine. I should have told you of it before, but——"

"Let me know it," said Thormod. "I forgive it you beforehand."

She said, "I hope you will remember what you have said. It is that word was brought to us a while ago that your friend Thorgar has been slain."

A chill seized Thormod's heart. He stared at Thordis.

"It was a seafarer from Augreswick who was here before you came back to us. He had been in Greenland. The news was all about there that there had been an affray."

"Who was his slayer? Did you hear that?"

"His name is Thorgrim Troll," she said. "He is a high chief out there; one of the great men."

Thormod sat quiet for a time. Then he asked her, "Why did you not tell me when I came here first?"

She did not answer quickly. "Do you ask me that?"

"Yes, I must know that."

"It was because I was happy to see you again, when I thought that you were as you used to be, and afraid that you would forget me when you knew it."

Thormod did not consider what it cost her to say so much. She did not exist for him at the time.

"I am well punished," he said, "by you and Thorbeorg, and I deserve it."

Thordis was crying. "Oh, don't take it like that. I am more than sorry for you."

"No, no," he said. "You have been kind. I did not mean that you were revenging yourself. Don't think that." Then he rose to go.

"Farewell, Thordis," he said. "I have work

on hand now. Maybe we shan't meet for a long time."

"I know it," she said, and let him go without another word. He went straight home.

VIII

It might be thought that Thormod's first act would have been to make a poem upon the life and death of his friend; but that was his second act. He went immediately from Grima's house to Augreswick, and was not long in tracing out the sailor who had told the news to Thordis. The sailor now repeated all that he knew, and added more. The quarrel had begun with a vaunting match in Earl Eric's hall at Ericsfirth. High words had passed, and Thorgar was said to have insulted Thorgrim Troll. The sailor thought he had been insulting. "If the upshot had been an affray," he said, "then and there, no one could have said anything, though maybe the end would have been the same."

"How do you know that?" Thormod asked.

"Master," the sailor replied, "Thorgar and his Icelanders were few. Thorgrim Troll had a great company of his own. Moreover of the Earl's house-

hold and guests three parts, I suppose, would have upheld a chieftain of their land. And Thorgar was in the wrong, being far gone in drink. To call a man a dog—and a great man, too—is one thing; to say that he has maggot on his liver is in excess.”

“Did Thorgar tell him that?”

“Those are two of the things he told him. He told him a number of things.”

“And what then?”

“Thorgrim Troll challenged to wager of battle; and it was agreed. But on the day set for that trial Thorgrim Troll with his friends lay hid by the way Thorgar was to come; leapt out at him and his following, and began the affray. Thorgar killed two of Thorgrim’s men, and jumped into the firth, to swim. Then Thorgrim Troll bade launch a boat, which was done, and himself in the bows. Therefrom he slew Thorgar with a harpoon in the middle of his back, between the shoulders. His body was not recovered, but floated out with the tide. But Thorgrim did not win much glory for the deed.”

Thormod was not able to see for the mist in his eyes. Nor could he speak for a while. "It was the deed of a dog," he then said.

"What became of Thorgar's friends?" he asked, and the man said that while all of those who accompanied him on the day of his death were killed with him, those who had stayed behind escaped. "I was of his ship's company," he said, "and found a hiding-place until Thorgrim Troll had gone home to his own country. Then after a time I found a ship going to Iceland; and in due course I will find another going to Norway, which is where I come from."

"Maybe," said Thormod, "you will find my ship; for I shall be going east before long."

Then he went home, and made his poem.

It has been lost now, so I cannot give it here. It was the greatest thing of the kind he ever did, was famous itself, and made Thormod famous in his day. It was not so much a lament as a celebration of the life and deeds of a man who had never known fear. Most of it came unsought into his mind so soon as the thought to make it had come;

but for some of it he had to make inquiry. Thorgar's deeds in England, what he did in the service of King Olaf—these things he had to learn. He may have learned among them of his purposeless killing of two men on the day before he left Iceland; but if he heard it is unlikely that he put it into his poem. Thormod himself was not by nature a fighting man, and nothing that he ever did would give colour to a charge of heedless slaughter against him. Nor, when he closed his poem with lament for the delights of intercourse gone for good, and for the untimely death of a young man so beautiful and swift as his friend, did he give a hint of that vengeance which he intended to take. His poem was declaimed throughout the north and north-west of Iceland, and Thormod was held to be as famous a poet as Cormac of Broadfirth, who indeed made only love-poems. And he was to find out before very long that it flew oversea, and reached the Eastern kingdoms before he did; for he allowed half of the following summer to slip away before all his preparations were made.

And when he set sail, having a ship and ship's

company to his mind, it was to Denmark that he went, instead of Norway, for it was thither that the voyage was purposed by the undertakers. For himself, he had all along intended for Norway, because he had found out that Thorgar had been of King Olaf's household. But ships were not plenty in the north-west, and he was on fire to be off—so he went to Denmark.

Cnut the Great, as they called him, and with reason, was King of Denmark, a king who made himself obeyed. Thormod's ship had not been long in the haven before a messenger came down from the King: greetings, a handsome cloak, and a call to visit him, which was a command. Thormod set off at once, and was brought into the King's presence. A strong, square-headed man he proved to be, with bent and shaggy brows over a pair of sharp eyes. Thormod, not lightly abashed, walked up between two lines of warriors and greeted the King very honourably. In answer the King held out his hand.

"You are welcome to Denmark," he said, "as are all good men. But what is it brings you here?"

“Sir, it is your own word.”

“That I can understand. But before you had word from me you were in my haven.”

“Sir,” said Thormod, “after a while a man knows his own country very well, and may desire to know others.”

The King nodded. “I see that you keep your own counsel—and you may be right. Now I hear of you as a man in all ways fitted to be in a court—and in some ways rarely fitted. You are a poet, I hear.”

Thormod said, “I have the name at home, but here you have famous poets at your call. Now I am not proven poet enough to mate with the like of them; and to be plain, the verses that I make come to me unbidden, as they will, not as I will.”

Again the King nodded. “That is as it should be. I am content if you are content.”

Thormod was not content, however. “Sir,” he said, “you are contented now because you know me little; but it is needful that you should understand that I am a hot-tempered man, and not always

sure of myself. Sometimes blow follows mood faster than I should wish."

"It is the way of your kind," said the King. "We understand all that here." He now looked as if it was a settled thing.

But Thormod wanted to get away, and so he might have done, if King Cnut had not divined him and become intent on having him.

"Sir," he said, after a time of choosing his words, "I hope you will not take it amiss if I say yet something more."

"Not a bit," said the King.

"It is that Thorarin the poet was here with you, and yet not altogether happily. For they say that his life was at one time hanging by a hair. Yet Thorarin was a much better poet than I am."

The King was not angry, as he might well have been; but he was not used to find men difficult. "You set a high price on yourself," he said, "and no doubt you do wisely. But I intend to pay it."

"God will reward you, sir, for your nobility, and He will pardon me, as you do, my working for myself. I would not have you take me into your

service unwittingly, nor would I take service until I knew my footing."

"Well," said the King, "I like you none the worse for your haggling, and am willing to pay for what I want. Now Thorarin had of me a mark of gold for his wages, and you shall have the same. That will show you whether I wish for you or not."

"Sir," said Thormod, "I take your offer, if with it you will give me your friendship and comfort, which I shall sorely need."

"If you don't have them," said the King, "it will be your own doing. So let that be a settled thing between us."

There, then, Thormod settled himself, and all went well for a while. He had free quarters and the run of his teeth; the King was friendly, and the courtiers in consequence more than friendly. He was so much in favour that not a word could be said against him—and not a word was. But in fact he never felt that he grew into the place, and was always looking about for a way of escape. He got it in the winter, when Harek came to court.

IX

HAREK was a wicking, that is a pirate, but the King liked him none the less for that; for of the plunder he took he was careful to let his high friend share liberally. He came to court during Thor-mod's first winter, and proved to be a genial companion, though no beauty to look at. Thormod made a poem about him, in which his unchancy appearance was not spared; but Harek thought it a good poem, and himself fair game. He watched Thormod unbeknown, and took to him. When the time came for the opening of his errand there came with it Thormod's chance.

Harek, it seemed, had lost his best man, the man who commanded the forecastle of his ship, and had all the talking and much of the adventure to conduct. He had been, as he had need, very free with his tongue, and once, at close quarters, had been a thought too free for those with whom he was

dealing. One of them had knocked him off the bows with a sweep, and there was the end of him.

“A pity,” said Thormod, “that he made so free.”

“Ah, but you must make free, standing up there,” Harek told him; “free with your tongue and handy with your weapon. Now,” he said, blinking heavily at Thormod, “I make no doubt as to your freedom in both kinds.”

“Ah,” said Thormod, “with the tongue I am a match for most men——”

“I’ll warrant you,” said Harek.

“And with the arm I can do something for myself, or I could. But I had trouble with a man at home who carved into the sinews of my right arm, and shall never be good again there. You are speaking to a left-handed man.”

“Whose left hand will do the work of other men’s rights, I’ll engage. Hey?”

“Oh, much can be done with the left,” said Thormod. “And it is as well, for much remains to do.”

“Enough said,” Harek concluded, and deter-

mined on him as the ornament and stay of his fore-castle.

He had to talk King Cnut round to his way of thinking, and managed it. But when the thing was put square before Thormod, that queer-angled young man boggled at it. He said that it was very well, that he would do it to oblige the King, but that he knew nothing of Harek except that he was a robber. Nevertheless, to oblige the King, he would do it—on terms. “But I make the condition, sir, that it be left to my choice to bring up the ship where I will, whether in haven or outside.”

The King frowned. “What is your meaning?”

“My meaning is as I have said, sir,” said Thormod, and would not say any more.

There was much trouble over it, and he very nearly lost the offer; but Harek wanted him, and so gave way.

And then there was trouble about getting his dues out of Cnut. The monarch was not a good paymaster, and while it was true that Thormod’s predecessor had been granted a certain wages, it is not true that he received it. But there was a pertinacity

about Thormod which the other had not possessed. It cost him two impromptu poems, for each of which he received a gold armlet. Having weighed them, he judged them equal to a mark of gold, and told the King that he was contented. The King took it all in good part. "If you find Harek as easy to deal with as you have found me," he said, "you will be thinking yourself somebody." Thormod modestly smiled. He thought himself that already.

He made no use of his discretion in the berthing of the ship until the end of the summer. The voyage was prosperous, with much fighting, and fair weather, too. Thormod came up to all Harek's expectations. He was ready in speech, and remarkably handy with his weapons. It was found to be true of him, as of Thorgar, that he feared nothing, except perhaps God. What fears he had there were not called upon, for God had very little to do with Harek's voyages. As far as he was concerned, all was well while nothing better offered; but he had sharp eyes, and the moment a chance came to him

he jumped for it—and that is what he literally did.

One evening, which wanted some three or four hours of dusk, Harek's ship was rowed into a fair haven in the main island of a group of them. Thormod, standing up in the bows, directed the helmsman, chose his mooring and at the right moment held out his hand as a signal to bring her to. He let go the bow anchor, and turned to watch them drop the other astern, when he saw men looking out to sea, and pointing others' eyes the same way. He looked out then himself, and saw a fleet approaching in line: ships of war, for he could see the shields along the gunwales, and the gleam of spears close together. They came on swiftly and headed directly for the place where he had berthed his own ship, but for some time he took no notice of that, being lost in admiration of the fine sight. High-prowed, painted vessels, driving the foam before them, churning the sea to yeast with their great oars; ten or twelve of them in line ahead, with distances kept to a yard: it was a sight to make the heart leap; and Thormod's leapt high. On the leading vessel the forecastle man was mak-

ing signals with his arms; more than that, he was shouting at the top of his voice, though nobody could hear what he said. Thormod, watching him, then saw that that ship in particular had a golden dragon at the prow; and at that his heart stood still, for he knew that there must be a great man on board, who could hardly be any one than King Olaf himself. He forgot everything now in the excitement of searching in the crowd astern for the figure of the hero—and meantime the ship drew near.

On his own ship there was bustle and confusion. Harek was crimson in the face: "Up anchor, up anchor, you cow-face!" he shouted to Thormod. Then Thormod saw that they were in danger of being run down. The King's ship was driving straight into them, and now you could hear what the man in the forecastle was calling. "Out of the King's haven! Out with you!" he was saying, and on all sides were ships' crews busy at the anchors.

Aboard Harek's ship two men were busy enough, but Thormod would not have the bow-

anchor touched. "No, no," he said, "the berthing is my business. That was agreed upon."

Harek raved at him. "Do you want to have us cut in two? Are you mad?" and so on. But Thormod would not stir.

The Dragon-ship came on, and all of Harek's people thought it was their last hour—but not so. At the last moment she sheered off, and ran alongside, and as the bows came level the man on the King's fore-castle cut at Thormod with an axe, and only just missed him.

Thormod, with a longsword, replied, and to some purpose, for he caught him on the back of the neck and felled him into the water. Immediately after that he jumped on to the King's ship, his shield on his right arm, his naked sword in his left, and ran clean up the deck toward the poop.

The thing was so sudden and done so vehemently that he got more than halfway before he was stopped. Men simply made a road for him, some no doubt supposing him mad. But as he neared the poop of the vessel he was surrounded, and then it was all over with him. He was disarmed, tied

up and guarded, while word was passed astern to King Olaf that the fool had been taken.

"Good," said the King; "and now let some one serve him as he served my man."

Fin Erneson, a fine tall man, heard the saying and went forward to look over the prisoner. He was a chief, and nobody cared to gainsay him. Thormod was quite cool, and met Fin's looks with a steady and good-humoured one of his own.

"Now, what possessed you, I wonder, to do the like of that?" Fin asked him.

Thormod, with his engaging stutter, replied: "Curiosity."

"Were you anxious to see death, then?"

"No," said Thormod. "I was curious to see the King, and so I hope to do before he has me killed."

"And why did you wish to see the King?"

"Because he is the greatest man alive, and the man of all men I have most desired to see. If I could get into his power, I thought that was the first thing; and I thought of nothing else. So I jumped for it."

“Yes, you jumped for it,” said Fin. “I saw you. But first you cut down a man of ours.”

“Yes, I did,” said Thormod, “but that was because he tried to cut me down.”

Fin rubbed his chin under his beard, and thought about it. “Hold your hands a little,” he said to the men round about him. “I will see the King upon this.”

He made his way back, and found the Bishop—Bishop Siffrid it was—as he went. “Come with me and help me save a fine man’s life,” he said. So the two of them went to the King.

Fin Ernesson worked hard for Thormod, and the Bishop allowed he was a gallant man. “That is as may be,” the King said, “but I have to learn whether he is only a fool.”

“You will learn it, sir, in two words, if you will have him brought before you.”

“Bring him, then,” said the King. So Thormod was led before him.

He was not even now abashed or put out of countenance before that great man. King Olaf looked sternly at him, very square in the jaw, very

chilly in the bright blue eyes. Thormod in turn looked him full in the face. He was much too interested to think of what was going to happen to him. The King did not speak for some time. Then he said, "Are you a fool, or are you a rogue?"

"Neither," said Thormod, "but a poet."

"You kill my look-out man, on my own ship, in my own haven; then you run baresark among my warriors. What am I to think of that? Is that your poetry?"

"No, sir," said Thormod, "but this is my poetry which comes to me as I look at you. I say that I should think I had all Heaven in my two hands if I stood to you as your man. And again I say that life and death are one to me if I find life and death beside you and Fin."

"Lord," said Fin, "that was well spoken, and by a man of mark." But King Olaf did not heed Fin, considering rather the man before him.

"I see you are a wild fellow enough," he said. "Life means little to you in comparison with your desire. Yet I see also that you will likely be faith-

ful if I keep you. How do you call yourself, and whence are you come?"

"I am Thormod Bearnesson and from Iceland," the poet answered; "and more than that, I am sworn-brother to Thorgar Hawarsson, who was a man of yours."

King Olaf nodded, but grimly. "So he was; and I told him when he came to me that he would not be lucky. Nor was he. But you, from the look of you, may fare better than he did."

"If I cause not one man at least to fare worse than my brother," said Thormod, "I shall deem myself the unluckiest man living."

"How many men's deaths lie at your door?" the King asked, not noticing his declared purpose.

Thormod rapidly reckoned. "I have slain six men, lord," he said; "and that man in the bows of your ship was the sixth."

"And how old are you?"

"I am not yet thirty years old," said Thormod.

"If you live another thirty years," the King said, "you will have done slaughter enough."

"There is but one man, so far as I can tell, whom

I must call to account," Thormod told him, "and that is Thorgrim Troll, who basely slew my brother Thorgar. It was to that end I left Iceland, and to that end I jumped into your ship. I should have come to you before had I not been carried to Denmark, for I knew very well that you would never let your man's death go unavenged. Now I am here and in your hands I am sure you will not."

The King turned to the Bishop and Fin, and heard them both plead for Thormod. He did that more for the form's sake than for any other reason. His mind was made up already. Then he said to the guards who held him, "Cut him free;" and to Thormod, "You pay ransom for my man's life with your own, which I consider belongs to me. You have been open with me, and I approve of it. Now serve me well, both with head and hand."

Thormod broke out into a verse, and King Olaf heard him through. "I think we shall suit each other," he said. Then Thormod walked forward with Fin Ernesson, and was made much of.

X

A SHIP came in from Greenland that autumn, and the master of it was a man called Scuf. Scuf was a Greenlander by birth and the long settlement of his family; a middle-aged, reputable man well known in Norway and highly esteemed by King Olaf. When Thormod heard who and whence he was, he said, "Here's my chance come suddenly," and went to see Scuf.

They took to each other, though Scuf was a man of five-and-forty; but, as he explained, brave men were rare in any country that he had ever seen, and ought to stick together. "And it will be well for you," he said, "to have me at your back if you are going adventuring in Greenland against Thorgrim Troll. As well might you work against Eric Red, or nearly so. What Eric Red is to Ericsfirth, so is Thorgrim Troll to Einarsfirth. What! a man of wealth and lands, with a following from here

to Easter. And a stout, gusty man, a great eater, an abounding drinker; a man of blood, a man of iron. And if he is stirred in his pride, nothing will serve him but your life."

"He shall serve himself of mine if he can," Thormod said, "but I hope to be beforehand with him."

"You sail with me," said Scuf, "and you put yourself in my hands. I know the country and I know the man. I bear him no grudge myself, for he has never done me any harm that I know of. But a friend is a friend, and he is no friend of mine. I need say no more."

"Not a word," said Thormod, "for I understand you very well, and hope to deserve your opinion."

After that Thormod waited, and served King Olaf with his best, until the winter should be over.

When Scuf was ready for sea, Thormod made his suit to his master.

"Greenland?" said Olaf. "And what will you do in Greenland? Trouble, I doubt. You will be for finding Thorgrim Troll, I suppose."

"There are things to settle with him, certainly," said Thormod.

"You will find him a hard dealer, and a close one," said the King.

"They tell me that I am a good singling dog, sir."

"You will have need to be. Well, you shall go, and I wish you good speed. And if I have my will with you, you will come back to me when you have finished with Thorgrim Troll."

"That I shall do, lord. I have told you what my wish is—to live and die with you."

Olaf gave him a ring for his finger and a sword for his side, and so they parted.

Walking down to the ship together, Scuf and Thormod went aboard. Presently they saw a stranger mount the gangway and come towards them: a huge man, with shoulders like a bull's and the chest of a horse. His hood was over his brows, so that little was to be seen of his face but a long black beard. He was heavily armed, and shook the gangway with his sturdy tread.

“Who is this monster?” Thormod asked. Scuf did not answer, but went to meet the stranger.

“I bid you hail,” said Scuf.

The heavy man put back his hood. “And I greet you fairly,” he said.

“If you have business with me,” Scuf said, “I must know your name.”

“Soon told,” the man said. “My name is Gest.”

“And whence are your people, Gest?”

He tossed his head sideways. “Spread abroad eastwards; spread abroad west.” And he jerked his head the other way. “Who knows where they are, or are not?”

“And how can I serve you now?”

“I ask you for my passage to Greenland.”

Scuf considered. “I don’t know how that may be. I know less of you than you seem to know of me. And I have a ship’s crew to think of.”

“What have they to do with it?” said Gest. “If you are master of the ship I take it to be your affair. But if your men think that they will have to work for me, do you tell them that I shall do my share of the work, and a little over. And

I see you have a passenger already, and can hardly refuse a second."

Scuf looked at Thormod, who nodded and smiled. "Shall I?" the look enquired.

"Why not?" the nod replied.

"Well," said he to Gest, "it shall be so." Gest saluted him and went back into the town to fetch his gear. It was nearly as big as himself, and two men did not suffice to bring it aboard. He saw it stowed, and immediately turned himself to be of use. He worked well, but was very grim and silent. Thormod thought him an oddity and worked hard, after his manner, in studying him. At noon they put out to sea.

The voyage was a bad one; heavy weather, dangerous seas, much snow, and little rest. All worked hard, but Gest did more than any one, and Thormod less. It was long before these two understood each other, if indeed they ever did. Gest thought nothing of poets, and Thormod was jealous of the man's strength and skill. Once at least they nearly came to blood-letting. That was when the two of them were at work baling ship. Thormod was below

in the hold, filling the buckets; Gest at the gunwale, emptying them. Thormod as he grew tired did not hand them high enough to please Gest, who had to stoop down to reach them. "Send them up smartlier, you half-man," Gest growled. But Thormod took no notice, or at least made no response. Gest bore it for a little while longer, then presently let a bucket fall, and drenched Thormod to the skin. That set him on fire; he jumped up and caught Gest by the beard. There was a sharp tussle, and then the pair of them parted and sought for their weapons. Scuf stopped them, luckily, before the fight began. He made them promise to keep terms with each other while the voyage lasted; and so they did. Thormod was not one to keep a grudge in his mind.

They were a long time at sea, and once came near shipwreck, when a wave broke over them, snapped the yard, and carried the sail overboard. Gest was invaluable then; without him they had lost the sail. Then it was a matter of splicing the yard, since they had no other. Scuf set Gest and Thormod at it, and each scoffed at the other. Gest

said, "Nay, let the poet shape the thing for you. He'll sing them together while you and I take our rest."

"Never," said Thormod. "Give the two pieces to Gest, and bid him sit upon them. You'll never part them again."

"Let me see you both at it," Scuf said, "and then we shall know whether brain or brawn makes the better workman." To it they went with their axes, and Thormod was done by far the first. Gest chipped away, working his tongue in his cheek like a boy at a writing-lesson. Then they fitted the two ends together, and even Gest owned that had they made a good job of it. The splicing was left to him by common consent, and when that was done they were able to sail again.

It was late in the year when they ran into Ericsfirth and came to anchor in view of the town. There, when the cargo had been taken ashore, Gest took leave of Scuf and Thormod. To the poet he said at parting, "It is likely we shall meet again."

"How will that be?" Thormod asked him.

Gest, with his expressionless eyes, looked over the dreary snow-covered hills. "Common good fortune or common ill fortune may bring us together. If it does, let your wit be mated to my sinew, and maybe we shall find each other of use. Let me tell you this, that I knew your friend Thorgar Hawarsson once upon a time."

Thormod pricked up his ears. "Did you so? Then it was here that you knew him?"

"No," said Gest, "it was not. It was in Norway." Then they parted—but they met again.

XI

GREENLAND, great, gaunt, empty country, half under ice and snow the year through, and all smothered in fog-fleeces for a six-month winter, was but newly colonised when Thormod reached it. Two firths run up into it, one from the south and one from the west. Upon the shores of them huddled the Norwegians who had settled the country and made their living as best they could. Eric Red was the great man of Ericsfirth, which had himself found, then settled, then named, and now governed. The other settlement was called Einarsfirth, and there Thorgrim Troll and his clansmen did as they pleased. The two colonies had no interdependence, and the authority which King Olaf claimed was more shadow than substance.

Scuf knew Ericsfirth, and was on the best of terms with Eric and his feudatories. The first man who came to meet him when the ship was moored

was one Thorkel Leifsson, who lived at Brent-lithe, and looked across the firth to Stockness, which was where Scuf himself lived. It was to Thorkel that Scuf recommended Thormod, whom he named as court-poet to the King and a fine young man in all ways. Thorkel at once offered him hospitality, and Thormod took it gladly. He and Scuf parted unwillingly, but were to meet again at Christmas, when Thorkel meant to have a Yule-feast.

Brent-lithe was a great house, with a fine hall, and a guest-room close by. That room was divided up by curtains for the sleeping-quarters of Thorkel and his friends. In the hall all the servants—and there were many—used to sleep. There were maids as well as men about the place, and one of the girls was sent in to Thormod to wait upon him, pull his clothes off, and make his bed ready.

Thormod noticed her at once, for he had a sharp eye for a girl. She was not at all handsome, but rather pale and mean-looking; nevertheless she had a good figure, and a power of attracting men which he felt at once, though he did not understand it. He asked her name, and she told him, Sigrid. Did

she come from Iceland? She said, No, but her father and mother had lived there.

“And are you married, Sigrid?”

She gave a half-laugh. “No, nor likely to be.”

“I should think nothing more likely,” Thormod said, “judging by what I feel about you.”

Then she said, “You had better not feel much about me.”

“Why not?”

“Because Lodin will have something to say about it.”

“And Lodin—who is he?”

“He is steward here. That tall man, red-bearded, who met you when you came in.”

“I know the man now,” said Thormod. “And is Lodin your sweetheart?”

“I don’t know that,” she said.

“Shall I ask him?”

“Better say nothing to him.”

“But if he say something to me about you—when then?”

“Then you will know what I can’t tell you.”

“Well, Sigrid, I am glad that you have been told

to wait upon me. It will send me to bed in good time."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because you draw me."

She looked at him, laughed, then looked away. Thormod kissed her, and she kissed him back, but wouldn't stay any longer.

It was not difficult to find out who and what Sigrid was, or in what relation she stood to the red-bearded and red-eyed Lodin; but Thormod did not on any of those counts cease his commerce. He had been wiser if he had—but then he would not have been Thormod. As he was, and as she was, it ended in trouble. Lodin spoke to her, and she tossed her head. Then he watched her, and, as it seemed to him, she was betraying him. One night after supper, when Thormod went off to his sleeping-quarters, and Sigrid made to follow him, Lodin with a curse sprang after her, caught her round the waist and held her. She struggled, saying, "Let me alone, let me alone," but could not get away. Thormod came back from the doorway, took her hands and tried to pull her free. There

was an unseemly tussle and much heat: then Thorkel cut in and stopped it all. "Let her alone," he bade his man. "She will come to no harm in there. Is there not a light burning, and am not I there? If you can't trust her there you can trust her nowhere, and are better without her." Lodin let her go, and she followed the two into the guest-house. Lodin would have beaten her if he dared, but was afraid that she would tell of him.

Then came the Yule-feast at Brent-lithe, with a great gathering to drink Thorkel's ale. Scuf and Bearne, his partner, came over from Stockness, Gest came from Wick, and many others. Here, for the first time, Thormod learned what lay before him in the vengeance he had so long meditated. He found it was likely to be a heavy matter.

Thorgrim Troll was the chief man in the settlement at Einarsfirth. He had a great retinue of his own, to say nothing of his family. Four nephews he had, all fighting-men. Bodwar was the eldest, himself older than Thormod; then came Falgar, Thorkel and Thord. But that was not all. In the house was Thorgrim's sister Thordis and

Hamund her husband, with those four sons of theirs; near by was another sister settled—at Longness. She was Thorunn, and she had a son named Leot, reputed one of the strongest men on the firth. Between them the clan overrode the countryside, and those who did not stand in with them had a hard life of it. One man there was who, Gest said, was not friendly with them, a steady, peaceable man called Sigurd. He lived with his mother at Cliff, and might be useful. “Your time—if you have a time—” Gest said, “is not now, but in the spring, when they hold the Moot, which you in Iceland call the Thing.”

Thormod wished to know more of the killing of his friend. He found out that it had been as he had been told, except that the slaughter had been done on the water. “Thorgar and his friends were in a boat—nine of them altogether. Thorgrim Troll and his five nephews were waiting in a creek, in a longship, and rowed out and across the boat’s bows. Then all nine were slain in the boat or in the water. Not one escaped. Thorgar was killed as he swam, with a harpoon in his back.”

"How do you know that none escaped?" Thor-mod wished to know.

Gest said, "In a curious way. I will tell you, if you wish to know."

"I do wish."

Gest said, "Two brothers, named Calf and Steinolf, lived in Garpsdale, and live there still. From them I have the tale. Now, in Olafsdale, not far away, there was a widow woman called Thordis, and a good woman she was and is, and a well-to-do woman. She had a son Eyolf, and a kinsman Thorgeir, whom she brought up from the breast. They called him Thorgeir Measureless, because he was exorbitant in all that he took, and set no bounds to his needs. Now these two were friends, such as I daresay were you and Thorgar Hawarson; but they were boisterous company for each other, full of tricks and all manner of rough play, and at it all day long. There was no place for them in the house or out of it; and no getting any work done when they were within a hundred yards of it. Well, one day it happened that they were wrestling in the hall, where an old wife sat

at her needlework; and if they dragged it off her knees once they dragged it fifty times. So at last she grew angry, and muttered to herself; and then she had a vision. She said, 'You may do your worst to me and my needlework, but I can see worse than that in it. Now I tell you that you two foster-brothers will break friendship and as ill as may be you will do it.'

"They listened to her, deep-breathing, with their arms about each other's necks. They laughed at her and looked at each other. 'We hope your needlework is better than your spædom, mother.'

"She said, 'Ah, you may laugh, but that will be the end of your play.'

"Now those two went out to Norway in the summer, and there bought a ship, and put to sea. When they were minded to come home they had an ill voyage, and made Borgfirth late in the harvest. Then it was that they disagreed about a landing. Eyolf was for running before the wind into Streamfirth, but Thorgeir was minded to keep the ship on her course, to round the Jokul, and get in at Dogworthness. There seemed no way of settling

it but by a vote, and those who wished to land at once carried it, because most were sick of the sea. But there was bad blood over it between the foster-brothers, who came as near as might be to crossing swords—only they were parted for the time. Directly they landed in Streamfirth Thorgeir took to horse and rode west into Garpsdale. There he stayed with Calf and Steinolf. Eyolf stayed aboard-ship till she was laid up, and then went home to his mother in Olafsdale. That winter's end the old spæ-wife died. She died on the Monday after Palm Sunday and had to be taken a-shipboard to go down to Holar, which was the nearest church.

“Now Eyolf and his men took her into church and set her down. Then the weather grew thick, and it came on heavy snow, and then a frost that held up the ship in the sound, and spread thick ice far out into the firth. It was needful that Eyolf and his folk should stay where they were till Easter was past—and so they did.

“On Thursday after Easter Eyolf borrowed a

horse and set off to ride home. He rode alone by his own wish. He rode east of Reekness, then east about Bearfirth and Crooksirth.

“Now he was not far from Garpsdale on his journey, though he was not yet in sight of it, when Calf and Steinolf, who were out of doors under the lee of a wall, saw men walking along the plain in a row. They carried weapons, and there were nine of them. They walked in file over the snow, and past the house, a few fields below it. When they were within fair view it was seen that they were bare-headed, sightless, and covered with blood. Looking closely at them, Calf and Steinolf seemed to know them. They were Thorgar Hawarsson, who walked in front, and eight men following him. They went along the plain past the house, came to the river that runs eastward from the house, and there seemed to fade into nothing at all. Calf and Steinolf were beaten down by this sight, and neither to each other, nor to any one could they speak of it. They went indoors and sat down, and so remained without speech.

“One of their hands was in the byre when those

things took place. He also saw a man—but only one man—and he was riding a fine horse. He was armed, helm, spear and shield, and rode past the house the very way which the ghosts had taken. The cowman knew him. It was Eyolf on his way home. He went indoors with his news. Thorgeir Measureless was in the hall, and the two brothers also. ‘Eyolf of Olafsdale is riding by the house,’ says the man, and Thorgeir pricked up his ears. He said nothing to anybody, but picked a spear from the rack, and went out just as he was. Outdoors he saw Eyolf, and ran after him, but Eyolf did not heed him, and kept on his way till he reached the river. There he was delayed by the ice-flood and had to seek out a fording-place. Thorgeir called out, ‘Hold, man, hold. Wait for me if you dare.’ Eyolf heard that, looked round, saw who it was. In a moment he came down from his horse, and ran to meet his foster-brother. They met full front, each with his spear. In the same encounter each ran the other through with the spear, and they fell together and so lay. So the spæ-wife’s prediction was fulfilled.

"When Calf and Steinolf found them they were not yet dead.

"Now that was after Easter, and certifies me when Thorgar Hawarsson met his death."

Thormod said, "You are right. But you know otherwise that they were killed in the water."

"Yes, that is common report in Greenland," said Gest.

Thormod said, "And you, Gest, are you minded to stand in with me?"

Gest shook his head. "It has been revealed to me that the vengeance is to be yours, and that you will succeed in it, though hardly. But if I can help you I will—so far as it is lawful."

"And who reveaeld these things to you?"

"It was King Olaf," said Gest, "who came to my bedside as I was lying awake, and told it all to me."

"He might have told me something," said Thormod; "but these things do not come to me. As it is, I take it from you."

These things set in order in his mind, Thormod

gave himself to the feasting, and enjoyed himself. He was happy, and his friends were happy in him. But when it was all over and the guests were going away, there came upon him the trouble due on Sigrid's account.

There was much bustle while the boats were getting ready, and all the gear taken down and stowed aboard. Scuf was down at the quay, Thorkel was with him; Lodin and the servants were running to and fro; the house was emptied except for the maids, and for Thormod and Bearne, who were taking their ease in the hall. Thormod lay on his back along a bench, supporting his head in his clasped hands. Bearne sat by the table. They talked idly. Presently Lodin came in from the quay, four men with him. Thormod took no notice, but Bearne looked round to see who it was. He did not see that Lodin's red eyes were fixed and angry; but he said, "What is it you want?"

"What is it I want?" said Lodin. "Why, lumber for Scuf's boat—and here is some that we can do without at Brent-lithe." So saying, he caught Thormod by the feet, pulled him to the floor, and,

"Here," he called to the men in the door, "pull out this evil carcase, and let Scuf take it over the firth." Thormod was laughing at him, but he and one of the men began to haul him along the floor. Then Bearne said, "Enough of this outrage," and jumped up and caught Lodin round the middle. He swung him round two or three times, and then let go. Lodin went swinging along the hall and fell in a heap. Bearne cursed the men roundly for what they were doing, and sent them out of doors; but Thormod took it all coolly.

Presently they all left the hall and went down to the boat at the quayside. Scuf was aboard, and Thorkel on the quay was talking to him. Bearne was ready, waiting till their conversation was over. Lodin and his men stood together a little way off, sharing the presents which they had been given. Nobody was thinking of Thormod as he came slowly from the hall and down the pathway to the water; but as he passed the group of servants, suddenly he swung his sword backhanded over his shoulder and brought it down on Lodin's neck. He felled him like an ox, and the wound was so

terrible that he was dead before he touched ground. Then there was a great to-do. Thorkel's rage blazed all over his face. He called out to his men to kill Thormod; but Scuf had him by the arm and held him. Bearne ran up to Thormod and told him to get into the ship. So he did; Bearne jumped down after him, and they threw off the gangway. Scuf was left behind to soothe Thorkel, and settle the case; but it took a deal of talking. As for Sigrid, who had been much the cause of it, she saw it all from the house, and would have gone after Thormod if she could.

The rest of the winter Thormod spent at Stockness, with Bearne and Scuf, making his preparations. He had to choose a servant, first, and of all the household he picked out the most unlikely, a great, clumsy, ugly dunce of a man, whose tongue was too big for his mouth. His name was Egil, but they called him Fool-Egil, and with every reason. "Why do you choose such a blockhead as that?" they wondered.

"Because I want a man who will do what I tell him. Anybody else of yours would say, 'That is

fool's work you ask for,' and would be right. If I want fool's work done I must have a fool to do it."

Another thing to be done was to get a weapon made after his own mind. Bearne, who was a good smith, made him that. It was an axe, with a shortish handle; but not a common axe. Where should be a hammer was a spike; where should be the broad blade there was a knife-blade, double-edged. It was strong, and very tough, and the edges of it as sharp as razors. When these things were done Thormod thought himself ready for the Moot at Einarsfirth.

XII

THE Moot was to be held at Garth, which is midway of the firth; and when the weather was open and the ice broken up, Scuf said that it was time to be off. He did not take a large company with him, because he said that however many he took they would be outnumbered there, "should it come to fighting." For himself, he said, he was not a fighting man, and he proved it by being careful not to inquire what business led Thormod into the other country. Bearne knew more about it than he did, for Bearne had not made a weapon for nothing.

So then they ran down Ericsfirth into the open sea, and with a fair wind from the south-west sailed up Einarsfirth without difficulty, and saw presently the church at Garth, and the booths for the Moot-men laid out in a broad green meadow. "Those booths," Scuf said, "are for Thorgrim

and the men of his allegiance. We shall hold on round that spit, and find our quarters behind the knoll."

There was a good deal of shipping to be seen, and much activity ashore. Men were busy airing and cleaning the booths, and others were carrying merchandise ashore for the stalls in the fair which was held between the two settlements. Thorgrim Troll's ship had not come in yet, but was expected daily. Meantime there was plenty to be done, and plenty to see. Thormod was very much amused and spent his time either watching other men work, or considering the lay of the land. He had no plans ready, but that was no concern to him. He felt that he was being blown forward to his destiny as by a strong wind, such a wind as had driven them up the firth, and was now driving Thorgrim Troll to the same place. One thing about the shores of Einarsfirth he noted, and that was that the further side was cut up into narrow creeks, and that there were no good landing-places there. The land shelved very much; there were ledges of rock, some of them not covered by the tide. "If I have to run

for it," he thought, "it will be over there that I must travel. It will trouble them to bring a long-boat in after me." He saw another thing presently: the banks and islands of rock stretched away down the firth as far as the eye could carry. "A man could slip down to the mouth of the firth without treading either shore." He took the trouble to make sure of that before he left the thing alone.

A day or two later he was told, "Thorgrim Troll is coming in." Bearne told him, and Thormod's face lighted up.

"That will be worth seeing." He went down to the shore with his friend.

A fine ship was coming down the firth with the tide, ten oars to a side were pulling her. Others came behind her, three or perhaps four, but none presumed to come abreast.

"He comes like a king," Thormod said.

"And that is what he thinks himself," Bearne told him. "Why, the firth is named after his father, and he claims the lordship of every green patch on this side, and of many on the other. Soon

or late he will measure himself with Eric, and then we shall see something."

"I hope you won't see that," said Thormod, but Bearne thought it as well to take no notice of him.

The ship was close at hand, and was a brave sight. From bows to stern there were shields along the bulwarks, and from amidships to the poop the spears rose as dense as a woodland. About the poop were great men standing in bright helmets. Bearne pointed out Thorgrim himself, seated, with a great white bearskin about his shoulders.

Thormod said, "He's a big man."

"Ah," said Bearne, "you may say so—but wait until you have seen his nephews."

"Yes, I must see his nephews too," Thormod said, and studied the standing chiefs about the chair.

They brought the ship ashore; the men leapt out and hauled her up the rollers. Then a gangway was made fast, and the spearsmen came down. After them the chiefs: there was not a man among

them, Thormod thought, under six feet in height, and he felt that he would not care to measure his chest against any one. Four young men came down close together; a family likeness showed them to be kinsmen. The sons of Hamund, Bearne said they were, Bodwar, Falgar, Thorkel and Thord. They had sanguine faces, dark hair and beards, and light-coloured proud eyes. Then came one walking alone, older than any of the four, and taller, but also fatter. He had a fat face, and a big mouth which showed red through his beard. "Who is that store-pig?" asked Thormod. He was told Leot of Longness. Last came Thorgrim Troll himself and was much saluted from the shore, though he took little notice of it. He looked about to see who greeted him and who did not. A man of fifty or more, Thormod thought. He had a dark flushed face, purple on the cheeks, a broad grey-beard, small pig's eyes, which showed a good deal of the white, and a nose out of the straight. "Somebody punched that for him in his youth," said Thormod, "and he has been touchy about it ever since." The great man passed so

close that Thormod felt the bearskin brush against his leg, and could hear the short vehement breathing of his gross body. He himself grew hot all over at the moment, and the hairs on his back bristled and stood up.

When they had all gone up to their booths the men went back into the ship and began to clear her of the arms and fishing-gear. All these things they threw ashore as they came. Thormod picked up a harpoon from one of the heaps, and began to muse over it as his way was. Presently one of the ship-men made a snatch at it. "Much use to you, that weapon, I engage," he said. Thormod, still holding the thing, looked at it.

"You think I know nothing of harpooning," he said. "But there are more uses than one for a harpoon."

The man gaped. "It would puzzle you to find any use for it."

Then Thormod touched his axe which was at his side. "I might find a handier weapon—but a harpoon would serve me at a pinch." He dropped it then, and turned back to walk up the shore.

He saw them raising Thorgrim's standard outside his booth, and stood to watch them. How long would it stay there? He saw that this booth stood apart from the others, at the end of a street of them, and noted the place.

XIII

THORMOD spied for his opportunity, but had to be patient, for he could not find it for some time. It is true that Thorgrim Troll was to be seen every day; but so were his people, and he was never without a following. It was to be seen how entirely he ruled the Assembly whenever it was held. It was his men only who were suffered to be there in arms; he himself sat as president of every meeting, and no verdict could be given unless he approved of it. In the booths he used less ceremony, and seemed indeed to do his best to be popular. He used to sit out the evenings on a stool outside his own booth, and there, when he had a goodly circle about him, he would tell tales, make jokes, and talk about himself and his family till a late hour. Thormod found that he was best away from these parties, for the man made him so angry that he

feared he might lose control of himself, and, with that, his life into the bargain. His plan, therefore, was to send his man Egil to listen, and come back with a report of what might be going on.

That went on for some time, and as it fell out Thormod was mostly left alone in the booth every evening. Egil had nothing out of the common to tell him, and with the sharp ears he had he could mostly tell by the laughter or clamour of the crowd how things were over the hill.

One night he lay asleep, alone in the hut. It was chilly, and he had covered himself with his fur cloak. It was fur on both sides—black and white. Egil came in presently and woke him.

“Master, you should be in the booths yonder. There is rare sport.”

Thormod listened, but could hear nothing. “What are they doing then?”

“It is at Thorgrim’s booth—half the Moot folk is there.”

“Yes, yes—but what are they doing?”

“Thorgrim Troll is telling them a tale.”

“What is it about?”

"Ah, that's more than I can tell you, being a fool at such things. All I can say is that the people sit as quiet as mice round his stool, taking in every word he has to tell them."

Thormod sat up on his bed. "Oh, you must have heard something which will help me. Is nobody named in the tale?"

"Oh, yes," said Egil, "there was a name I heard. I heard the name of Thorgar, a fine champion; and then Thorgrim named himself—and great doings that he did with this Thorgar."

"Oh, that is his tale?" said Thormod. "Has he finished it yet?"

"No, no. You should go and hear him finish it."

"I think I will," Thormod said, getting on to the floor. He put his cloak over his head and shoulders, with the black side out, took his axe, and went out. Egil went with him, and they walked together round the hill and into the town of booths beyond it. The streets were all empty, but they could see the crowd about Thorgrim's booth. Thormod turned off sharply and went behind the row

of huts and round that of Thorgrim Troll. He stood under the eaves, but out of sight of the listeners, and pulled back Egil, who, in pure ignorance, was for peering round the corner.

The evening, which had been sunny, suddenly clouded over. Thormod looked up at the sky. Then he looked at Egil. Then at the sky again. "Master, what ails you?" Egil said.

Thormod replied, "Egil, there will be a storm—much thunder. Now the thunder-blast foretells dire events. Heaven is angry, the sky cracks and the wrath peals through the crack. When that comes, beware what you do. Take to your heels, man, and away. Slip along, get home to bed, and lie there for safety. Do you heed me?"

Egil's eyeballs showed white rims. "Yes, master." At that moment the rain began, and the wind which precedes the thunder came on swift and cold. Egil's teeth began to chatter, but Thormod caught his arm. "Not yet, not yet." The men before Thorgrim's booth were all afoot now, and a stampede for home began. Thormod looked round at them. Men were crowding into Thorgrim's booth,

the others were scuttling home, plashing through the wet. But the great man sat still on his stool, sheltered under the eaves. Thormod turned to Egil. "Stay you where you are till you hear the crash. Then run for home." So said, he slipped round to the front of the booth and walked lightly up to Thorgrim Troll. The hood of his cloak shadowed his face.

Thorgrim took no notice of him, but Thormod stood beside him and waited.

"Did you finish your tale?"

"Ay," said Thorgrim, "all that mattered of it."

"What tale did you tell them?"

Thorgrim chuckled. "I cannot tell it to you again." Then he looked at him. "And who might you be?"

"Wigfus, they call me."

"And whose son are you, Wigfus?"

"The son of Torttriggr."

"I don't like your name," said Thorgrim, "or your father's name." He made as if he would rise at his leisure. Thormod swung up his knife-bladed axe and brought it down with a crash at

the back of his neck. Thorgrim's body fell in a heap, his head pitched into the street.

Thormod put his axe into his belt under his cloak and went to pick up the head. "Ho! Ho! come out!" he called. "Somebody has slain your chief!" Men came streaming out of the booth and saw Thormod holding the head. They were dazed; all spoke at once, came crowding round, gaping, wondering. "How?" "Who did it?" "Where's the man?"

Thormod quietly said, "I saw him coming, but didn't know what he was after. In a moment it was done, and he was off. He went that way. Let some one hold the head, and I will show you where he went."

They were so astounded that he was obeyed. A tall man took the head from him, others went straying about; but most of them talked about it. Presently there was an outcry from a distance and Thormod heard, "After him! Head him off!" and many men running. He guessed that they were after Egil, as they were. He himself went down to the shore, and, behind a rock, took off his

fur cloak, turned it inside out, and showed all white.

They caught Egil and examined him. But he was in such a fright that, as the tale says, the fear ran off him as heat off iron. "That's not a man at all," they said. "It would need a man to kill Thorgrim."

Men met Thormod also down by the shore, and he gave his name as Tortriggr (Untrusty or Ill-trusty). He said that he was looking for Thorgrim's slayer, and was let alone.

XIV

Scuf and Bearne were not long in hearing of the hue-and-cry after Thorgrim's slayer, and not long joining it either, for they valued their skins as much as anybody. But after a while, when the excitement had died down, they went home, and there found Egil twittering in a corner. "What ails thee, man? Has somebody been after thy life also?"

"A frightful storm," said Egil, "the worst in all my days. I heard the crash, and by the gods I ran—and men after me. They hailed me slayer of a man, but let me alone when they saw who I was."

"It was seeing *what* you were, not *who*," said Scuf. "Where is your master?"

"Dead of the thunder-clap, you may be sure."

"What is all this of thunder, you fool? There has been no thunder to-day."

"When I tell you that I heard it, as the master told me! Did I not run?"

They had it out of him by and by, and then began to understand the state of Thormod's business. They agreed that they had best go down the firth in a boat and waft him across the water. And that was what they did presently, and took some provision with them.

Some way down, beyond the Ness, they saw Thormod in his white cloak sitting on the rocks. They ran the boat inshore, and called out to him to get in, and to be quick about it. Thormod rose and stretched himself at ease, then hopped from rock to rock till he came to them. Then he jumped down into the boat.

"Well?" said Bearne.

"Well?"

"Is it well, man, or not?"

"It is very well with me at least," said Thormod. Scuf said, "You are the man, I suppose?"

"I am the man they want up there, if you mean that."

"That is what I mean. Well, well, that is something to have done—so great a man! The second man in Greenland—well, well!"

"He is not so great as he was," said Thormod, "by a head."

"Did you smite it off him?" Scuf asked.

"Yes, I did," said Thormod, "and picked it up for him afterwards."

"You had better have left it lying. That was near your last hour when they found you with the head on your knees."

That was Scuf: Bearne chimed in, "And another choice moment was when they found you at the Ness. If they had guessed at it then!"

"I am not a hard riddle to guess," said Thormod; "a stammering, black-avised, curly-polled fellow as I am."

"How they came to miss you beats me," said Scuf.

"It may prove an unlucky miss for some of Thorgrim's kinsfolk," Thormod said.

"Hoho! You are never going to have at the rest of them!"

"But I am," said Thormod. "For what else did I come to Greenland?"

Both his friends did their hardest to dissuade him. He was a notable man, they said; he was too notable. How did he think he would get away from Greenland? It was not so easy. Thorgrim's nephews would hunt the firth from end to end after him; he would be made an outlaw at tomorrow's Moot—and so on. But Thormod was very calm about it all. "One can die but once," he told them, "and nobody knows who the next dead man is to be, until he is dead."

By this time they were over the firth and inside the chain of islands which are found on that side. They left the boat and climbed the cliffs to a cave which Scuf knew of. It was a roomy and dry cave, midway the face of the cliff, and reached by a grass ledge. You could climb down to the water, or up to the mainland, but not easily. The safest way was that by which they had come. "Now," they told Thormod, "do you stay here, and be careful how you show yourself. When the Moot is over we will come for you. You will be an outlaw by that time and anybody's capture—but we will not forsake you."

“Good,” said Thormod. “Now let me eat and drink something—especially drink something.”

They left him, and rowed back to the booths without adventure; but next day they were sent for to appear at the Moot, where Thorgrim's nephews moved the outlawry of Thormod. The other two, luckily for themselves, were able to prove where they had been at the time of the slaughter. As for their acquaintance with Thormod, Bearne said that he had never set eyes on him until he came to Ericsfirth in the ship from Norway, and Scuf that he was a stranger to him whom he had met on the quay before he sailed.

Then Thormod was pronounced outlaw, and shortly afterwards the Moot broke up. Scuf and Bearne did not at once go home; but making out that they were going to buy cattle, went to stay with the widow Sigrid at Cliff. They knew that Sigurd, her son, was no friend to Thorgrim Troll and his kin. But they saw Thormod before they went there, took him more provender, and bid him keep close. Thormod grinned and said that he would look after himself.

XV

It was certainly very dull in the cave, and Thormod had never been able to bear dullness with fortitude. For a day or two of fine weather he contented himself with the grass ledge, upon which it was easy to lie at length, and possible to sit. Then, as he lay on his back looking up the cliff's face, he thought it would be interesting and perhaps useful to attempt the climb. No sooner thought than attempted. He succeeded before long in finding a straight way up. Next he tried for a passage down to the shore, and in that too he was lucky. After that he could not be contented to sit about. He took short walks in the country and amused himself very well without meeting anybody. And then, one fine evening, he saw a man coming along the top of the cliff—a limping old scarecrow of a man in a long cloak which showed the light through in more than one place. There

was not much to be afraid of there, at any rate; so Thormod went to meet him.

He was as dirty as he looked, and, as Thormod judged, older than he looked. His cloak, which barely held together, was verminous, and he had a bag over his shoulder in which he carried, no doubt, whatever he could pick up. He stood blinking his bleary eyes and waited for Thormod to speak to him. He was too old to be frightened of anybody.

“A good evening to you,” Thormod said. “You travel light, I see.”

“Ay,” said the old man, “with all my wealth on my back.”

“And other things besides not so profitable,” Thormod told him. Then he asked him, “And who may you be?”

“Odde, sir, Odde is my name—but mostly they call me Lousy Odde, and very rightly so. I am a beggar by trade, and by inclination also, for I never did like work, and long ago determined that I would have little to do with it. Now I go up the firth and down the firth, and what I find is

mine, and what I can get out of the folk is mine too."

"And do you do well at your trade?"

"Better than you might think to look at me. I am an idle old dog, and that's the truth. They know that. But they know also that I am not a fool, and not much of a liar, and on that knowledge proceed the alms they bestow. Now, sir, you are a stranger to me, yet I thought I knew this country well. And what may your name be?"

"Oh, I am called Torrad."

"And what trade do you follow?"

"None at all. I am a vagabond, very much of your stamp. But I am ready to do some trading with you if you will."

Odde looked doubtful. "My sack is light," he said. "I have little worth your buying."

Thormod said, "Will you sell me the coat on your back?"

"Now you are making game of me," said old Odde.

"Not in the least," said Thormod. "I will make an exchange with you. You shall have mine for

it, and do me an errand into the bargain. Get over the firth and go to Cliff, where friends of mine, Scuf and Bearne, are living. Tell them that you met one Torrad walking out here and changed coats with him. No more than that, and I shall be satisfied. Now, will you do that for me, and earn my cloak?"

Odde looked at the speaker, looked at the weather, looked at the water. He thought it would be difficult to get a passage—but he wanted Thor-mod's cloak. Well, he said, he believed it might be done. Finally, he promised, and the exchange was made. Thormod saw him on the road before he went back to his cave.

The next day, his axe in his belt, the lousy cloak over him, he walked briskly up the firth till he came opposite the settlement on the other side. Then he turned away from the water and went up into the country for a spell, and when he saw what he wanted—which was a flock of sheep—he made straight for it over broken ground with rocks and bogs interspersed. Presently in some salt

marshes beyond him he saw a man with the sheep whom he guessed to be—as indeed he was—a shepherd of Hamund of Longness and of Thordis his wife, the sister of Thorgrim Troll. He turned at once towards the man; but now he walked with a limp, and pulled the hood down over his face.

It was getting dusk, and Thormod held the hood close about his mouth to cover his lack of beard. He asked the shepherd if the young masters were at home or not. The shepherd said that Bodwar was away, but that the others were out fishing and should be home before dark. “Right,” said Thormod, and limped away. He went down to the water, found the boat-house, and sat down there out of sight.

He heard the oars knocking in the rowlocks from a long way off, but had to wait till they were close inshore before he made out the three sons of Thordis. But he was able to satisfy himself of them before they came in. Falgar sat aft, Thord was amidships, and Thorkel was kneeling in the bows ready to make fast when they ran her up the shore. Just as they were about to touch the gravel Thor-

mod came limping out of the shadow and stood waiting for the boat. Thorkel saw him, thought it was old Odde, and thought no more of him.

But Thormod had his axe behind his back, and when the boat ran in and Thorkel was stooping forward with the chain in his hand, he gave him a blow on the top of the head which killed him instantly. Then Thormod pulled off the lousy cloak and ran fleetly along the shore; the two young men leapt into the water, splashed ashore, and after him. He ran well, but they ran faster, for they were hard upon his heels on the cliff, and when he came to his cave, and jumped for the grass ledge, almost in the same moment Thord leapt after him—but in leaping came down on all-fours. That was Thormod's opportunity. He drove the axe with all his force into the middle of his back.

He drove too hard. Thord fell prone, but the axe was immovable, and while he was tussling with it Falgar jumped down to the ledge and hewed at him with a sword. Thormod felt that he was badly hurt between the shoulders, and turned to face his new enemy. He let go of his axe, and

springing forward caught Falgar under the armpits and held him fast. Falgar dropped his sword over the cliff, which was Thormod's luck; but he was the stronger man, and an unwounded man, and it would have gone hard with the poet if, as chance would have it, they had not both gone over the ledge and tumbled into the firth, struggling together. Another lucky thing. If the tide had not been high at the time Thormod at least had been a dead man.

The water revived him for the moment, and he swam level with Falgar, and waited his chance. They snatched at each other more than once; but Thormod could swim like an otter and ducked more often than he was ducked. Diving once, he caught Falgar by the breeches, felt something give way, and guessed that he had broken the strap which held them. He dived again, caught hold again and pulled with all his might. Falgar's breeches slipped away as he struggled in Thormod's hold. They came down below his knees, held his legs together, and he was done for. Thormod, with what little strength he had left, swam to a ledge of rock and

pulled himself up. Then he fainted, and did not see the drowning of Falgar, which after various sousings and bobbings-up was the end of him. But as for Thormod, there he lay all night.

XVI

THE lousy old man had been as good as his word. He presented himself before Scuf and Bearne before nightfall, at about the time when Thormod was sitting in the shadow of the boat-house. He would have been stronger with his errand if he had been able to get a passage over the firth—but it was quite as well for Thormod, as things turned out, that he had been delayed for twenty-four hours. Directly Scuf heard the message, he recognised the blue mantle the man was wearing, and knew that he had spoken the truth. He turned indoors and told Bearne about it. Bearne said, "That is an old shift. Ogmund Dint played it on Gunnar Helming not many years ago, and a fine man lost his life through it. Now we had best go out and look for our friend. Late as it is, I am minded to go at once."

Scuf thought it wiser to wait till the hour before sunrise. "If, as I think, he has done some notable deed, there will be some search-work going on to-night in which you and I had better not be seen."

Bearne was unwilling to wait, but Scuf stuck to it. "What sort of fight can we make against the sons of Hamund?"

That was unanswerable—so they went to bed and rose before dawn.

The firth was quiet enough when they put off. They rowed down the further shore, with muffled oars, and kept a sharp look-out over the water as well as the land. After half an hour's rowing Bearne suddenly stopped.

"Something lies out on the seaweed yonder. It may be a man, and it may be a seal."

Scuf looked round. "It's a man," he said. "Pull away." They knew it was Thormod before they landed.

He was alive, and looked at them with one eye, smiling, but not moving his head.

"How is it with you, man?"

"I can't move," said Thormod. He was shivering and deadly pale.

"You have been struck?"

"Yes, truly I have; but I have been striking too. I gave more than I got."

"Whom did you engage?"

"The nephews—Falgar, Thord and Thorkel."

"And which of them did you slay?"

"I slew all three."

"What, in one night?"

"In one night."

Scuf chuckled.

"That was a bad miss they made when you slipped away from the Moot, I'm thinking. Three champions in one night. Well, well."

"Good for a poet?" says Thormod, shivering away.

"We must get him out of this," said Bearne. "Thormod, can you walk if we hold you?"

"I can't move, I tell you. I am stiff from top to toe."

"Fetch the sail," said Scuf. "We'll carry him."

"Yes, and bring me a dram with it," Thormod called after him.

Bearne came back with his cordial. Thormod's teeth were clenched, and had to be forced open with a knife-blade. But he drank the fiery stuff until his eyes watered. Then they turned him over on to the sail and carried him into the boat. The movement started his wound again, which must be bandaged. Thormod bore everything with cheerfulness, and went on with his stammered jokes all the time.

"Now," said Bearne, "we must look lively, for we have a long way to go."

"Where are we going?" Thormod wanted to know.

"We are going out of this firth altogether, and as far up the other as we can get," Scuf said. "If we are off soon the tides will serve us to rights."

"Don't forget to bring me my axe," said Thormod. "You will find it up there on the ledge, sticking in a man's back."

Bearne climbed the cliff to the ledge, and discovered the dead Thord with the axe lodged in his

spine. He came back with Thormod's clothes in a bundle, and the axe as well. "I made you a handy weapon here," he said.

"Yes, you did," said Thormod, "but the pattern was mine."

He was easier now. The drink had warmed him, and the flow of blood eased his stiffness. Presently he was able to eat something, and as he munched he talked to the two men rowing. He related the whole affair to them. The drowning of Falgar filled them with admiration. "You are a swimmer, it is very plain. Whatever end you make I don't suppose it will be in the water."

"N-n-no," said Thormod, "I shall d-d-ie in b-b-attle."

"And where will your battle be?"

"Oh, not here. In Norway—with King Olaf."

"You know something, then?"

"Yes," he said, "I know a few things."

"You are a wonder of the world," Scuf said; and Thormod replied, "All p-p-oets are."

"Why so?" Scuf asked; and was told, "Because they think of only one thing at a time."

The tides served them well, as Scuf had hoped they would. The last of the ebb took them out of Einarsfirth, and the flood took them up Ericsfirth to the head of it. There they stayed. Bearne sat in the boat with Thormod, while Scuf made his way up the mountain to a little house close under the glacier where a queer old couple lived—no one knew how. Gamle was the man—a strange man, dark and twinkling, uncertain in his temper, but known to be a great hunter; Grima was his wife, very wise, very cunning, an old heathen, and something of an old witch. They had never been Christianised, they saw nobody, and did not want to see anybody. When Scuf went into the house he saw them sitting side by side over the fire, blinking at him like two owls vexed by the light.

But Scuf knew them well, and they him. They made him welcome after their fashion, gave him a horn of the right stuff, and a place by the fire. Presently, when he had drunk somewhat, he opened what he wanted of them—hospitality and healing for King Olaf, who had been badly wounded. They

said nothing to that, but went on blinking at the fire.

Presently the woman, Grima, said, "Who wounded him?" And then the whole story had to come out, and Scuf reckoned he had better make a clean breast of it. They blinked more than ever after that, and Grima said, "Your man is not everybody's man."

"No, he is not," Scuf said, "but I know nobody who can serve him except yourself. And if any action is brought against you for what you do, you may reckon upon me to make good all that you suffer. As for the charges you are at for Thormod, there is plenty to meet that with. Now, I wish you would do us this kindness."

The two of them looked into the fire for a long time. Presently Gamle said, "Well!" and Grima said, "Ay, ay"—and that was all that they did say; but Scuf, who knew them, understood it, and went down to the shore.

Presently they brought Thormod in between them, and laid him on a bed. Grima, who treated him as if he had been a child, turned him over, and

peered into the wound. She muttered fast to herself, grumbling and scolding at the bad appearance of it, the dirt that had got in and the like. When once she got to work, however, she showed her quality; for she cleansed and bound up the gash, and made Thormod easier than he had been since he got it. Scuf could see very well that he and his hosts were going to get on together, and soon afterwards went off to Stockness, where they lived.

XVII

THE cold had settled in Thormod's wound, and he was ill for many months—they say twelve. So slowly did he get on, that in the spring following the deed which had earned it him he could walk no further than from one room to another, that is, between bower and hall. He used to make this excursion many times in the course of the day, but was always exhausted by it.

Meantime, and for long, it was supposed down in the firths that he had been drowned with Falgar, for that young man's body had been washed ashore, and showed no wounds upon it. Thord had also been found, and the earth-slide which the other two had made when they fell off the ledge. Thor-dis, the young men's mother, never believed it, but everybody else did, including Bodwar, the only son left to her. But in the following spring something

came to Thordis, a dream or a vision, which changed the whole position.

She slept late one morning, and whined and talked in her sleep. Bodwar would not have her disturbed, for like every one else of his generation he held strongly by dreams. No doubt but she had the second sight, for presently she awoke with a start and sat up, looking wild, in her bed. "What have you been dreaming of, mother?" Bodwar asked her, and "What have you seen?"

"Ah," she said, "I have been over the fells on my broomstick this night, and now I know a thing or two which I did not know when I went to bed."

"What things are they?"

"I know," she said, "that Thormod, who slew your brothers, is alive—and I know where to have him, too."

"Where, then?"

"He is with old Gamle and his witch-wife under the glacier at Ericsfirth Head."

Bodwar was much impressed. "Are you sure of that?"

"How should I not be sure? Didn't I see him

limping there? Now, get your boat down, my son, and choose your rowers, and we will go after him."

"He is a dead man if so be that we find him up there," Bodwar said.

He made ready, and manned a boat, taking fifteen men besides himself, well-armed. They rode down the firth and out to sea, ran up Ericsfirth, and stayed at Brent-lithe, where Thorkel lived, who had been the first man to harbour Thormod when he came out to Greenland. As it was now late, they stayed there for the night, meaning to be off the first thing in the morning. But this could not be managed, for Thordis thought it was very necessary to get Thorkel's countenance, and when he had agreed to go with them it did not suit him to take less men with him than she and Bodwar had. In fact, he took more. Gamle was a tenant of his, and entitled to fair play, especially from men out of the other firth.

Now it was Grima's turn for visions, and we are told that they did not fail her. She saw Thor-dis's boat rowing up the firth, knew how many men

were in it, and what their errand was. She took the direction of affairs at once, and Thormod was amused to see how completely Gamle was at her orders. He was to stay home, but not show himself. And he was to put a kettle on the fire in the bower and boil seal in it. Gamle went off obediently to do as he was told.

“And what am I to do, mother?” Thormod wanted to know.

She drew forward the great chair which was in the corner by the hearth. It was a huge, old-fashioned chair, deep enough to hold two people. It had a canopy; and on the pillar at the back was carved a huge image of Thor who spread out his arms and made the canopy. “Sit you there,” said Grima, “in the midst of the reek, and never move out of it whosoever comes in or goes out. If you are to die you will die, and it makes no matter to you whether you die in a chair or against the wall. So sit you still as a mouse until I bid you out. Now I shall go and spin my yarn on the threshold, and let them do their worst.” By this time the bower was thick with seal-reek—impos-

sible to see your hand in front of your face. Thormod was so amused that he roared with laughter, and made Grima angry. As for Gamle, the thicker the smoke grew the more seal he put into the kettle.

Grima saw the two boats before long, and called out to Thormod to stop fooling. She saw them land their folk, saw the parley that ensued, then watched Thorkel come alone up the path to the house. She went on with her spinning.

“Well, mother, and how’s it with you this day?”

“Eh, none too bad. Gamle’s busy at home with his seal-kettle, and I am here to be out of the reek. And what brings you up so far from home?”

Then he told her what he had come about. “Thordis of Longness has it in her mind that you are harbouring an outlaw—Thormod the poet from Norway. Now I told her I thought that not likely—for that would be a heavy charge for you.”

“Too much for me, master,” said Grima. “What would I be doing with a murderous outlaw, and me lonely in my house most days of the week?”

“So I told her,” said Thorkel. “But nothing

would suit her but she must come and ransack. And that is our business with you."

"Ransack, with all my heart, if you ransack alone. But I will not be over-run with a score of armed men, and I don't want Thordis of Einarsfirth turning my things over, either. You I know, and am always glad to see her—but of Einarsfirth people, the more I know the less I like them."

"But, you see, mother, it is Thordis who is hunting, and not me. I have obtained it from her that I shall be present, in order to insure you against malice. I hope then that you will be reasonable—otherwise——" and he indicated the men-at-arms on the shore with a sweep of his hand—"otherwise——"

Old Grima tossed up her head. "Oh, I know, I know—Well, so you are with her——"

"I shall be," said Thorkel, and went down to the shore, whence he returned with Thordis, a quick-eyed, black-browed woman.

They ransacked the byre, the storeroom and the turf-shelter; they went through the hall and opened the door into the bower. The seal-reek came out

like a sea-fog. Thordis did her best, but could not face that. "Somebody must be in there making that foul reek," she said. "Thorkel, do you go and see who it is." Thorkel went in a little way, and was soon swallowed up in the reek. He came back presently and said Gamle was there, boiling seal-blubber.

"Did you tell him to stop it?"

"I did so—but he shook his head at me, and put on more blubber. He is hard of hearing, is Gamle."

"Well," Thordis said, "we must go on the roof, and open the vents. We can overlook the place very well from there."

With a ladder they did so. The smoke lifted somewhat and Thordis could see into the bower. She saw Gamle by the fire, stirring his kettle; and she saw Thor above the chair, with his arms apart. Nothing else was to be seen; so then they went down the ladder, and renewed their search outside.

Then they came round the house to Grima, who was spinning yarn and muttering to herself. She took no notice at all of Thordis, but Thordis was

accustomed to be noticed. "We came up here to find heathens, it seems. I see you have Thor over your chair, dame."

"Ah, there he is, the old scamp, sure enough," said Grima. "And let me tell you there is some use in Blackbeard to people like me who cannot get down to hear the priest of God in the church. For I look Thor in the face, and say, 'You are a wooden god, Thor, and if I chose for it I could light the fire with you. But the God in church was not made with hands; and when men slew Him, He rose the third day. Now you—if I put you in the fire—it is white ash you would be in the morning.'"

Thordis pressed her lips together. "It sounds very well—but if we were to push you hard, maybe we should learn more about you and your practices. I have it in my mind that you could tell us something of Thormod if my son and I, and the men we have with us, were to make you speak."

"More goes into the mind than sense," said Grima, "and maybe it is the better for you that Thormod is not in my house, if all I hear of him

and your sons is true. But you are sore about that, so I'll say no more."

There was no more to be said or done by the ransackers, who presently went off to their boats, and set out for home. Then Thormod came out of the reek and sat in the sun beside Grima. She scolded him, and he laughed at her; but they had grown very fond of each other. By the end of the summer he was well of his wound, and anxious to go down the firth to Stockness. But Grima would not suffer that, and sent Gamle down instead.

XVIII

SCUF and Bearne came up to fetch Thormod away. He paid his farewells, giving handsome presents to the good old couple. They were as sorry to lose him as if he had been their son; but Thormod himself was anxious to be doing something. They all three went to Stockness, where a shelter in the storehouse had been fitted up for him. He was there that winter—his third in Greenland—and in the course of it Scuf sold the Stockness estate, and made his plans for fitting out a ship. They would all leave the country and settle in Norway. That was the plan, which was only delayed by Thormod's next venture.

As soon as the sea was open again he told his hosts that he had affairs of his own which he must settle before he left the country, and if they guessed what those were he left them guessing, for he would tell them nothing definite. He put some stores into

a boat, took Egil to row, and set off. Thormod steered, and took a course down Ericsfirth, and out to sea; then up into Einarsfirth once more.

They were well up Einarsfirth when Thormod grew fidgety and began to rock the boat. "Easy, master, or you will capsize us," Egil called out. "Why, what's the matter with you?"

"I have a fit," Thormod said, and went on with his rocking. Egil gave over rowing, which was not possible under such conditions, shipped his oars and made them fast under the thwarts. Thormod went on with his fit until he had filled the boat with water. She settled down, and the two men were swimming. Thormod, who had his axe with him, dived immediately, and swam under water until he was well away. Then he came up, to dive again immediately; and so he went on until he reached the shore. As for Egil, who was a good swimmer too, he managed to get the boat over on to the keel, and to row her with the rudder until he was in water where he could stand. After that he was not long baling her out, nor in floating her again with himself aboard. He got out his oars

and set to rowing home as fast as he could lay to the work. Arrived at Stockness, he had his tale already. Thormod had drowned himself, and there, so far as Egil was concerned, was the end of him. He couldn't tell them whereabouts they had been when the fit began, nor had he seen Thormod after the boat filled. He was quite sure his master was drowned. Scuf was not at all sure.

But Thormod had had his plans cut out. It suited him that Egil should row him so far, but not that he should come any further. So he took the shortest way with him that occurred to him, and with great success. When he came ashore he took his clothes off, wrung them out, dried them in the sun. Then, dressed, he set off walking, and went on all day till he came to Cliff, where Sigrid lived with her son Sigurd. These were a couple whom he had known on his last visit as unfriends of the Thorgrim clan.

It was dark when he came to Cliff and knocked at the door. A heavy young man came out, opened the door, said nothing except good evening, and went back into the house. Thormod followed him

in, and sat down by the fire. Sigrid was there, watching him, and said to Sigurd, "And who is this young man?"

Thormod said, "Slowman is my name."

"That's a name for many a man. Will Slowman stay here the night?"

"He will if he is asked," said Thormod.

They played out this play solemnly through the evening meal; but in the morning Sigrid came to Slowman's bedside, and said, "Now, Thormod, what is it you purpose in these parts?"

He laughed, saying, "My name is Slowman."

"Not here," Sigrid said. "I knew you again the moment you came in last night."

"Then let Slowman go his way," Thormod said. "Now I will tell you that I am minded to go up to Longness where Thorunn the sister of Thorgrim Troll lives; and there I will meet if I can with Leot her son. They tell me that he is something of a champion, but I wish to teach him to keep a still tongue in his head. He has been talking about me—or so I hear."

Sigrid nodded her head. "If that is what you intend, I will send my son Sigurd with you. Leot and his mother have held our faces to the ground this many a year."

"There's a remedy for that," said Thormod, "but it does not always answer. Now if we fail it makes no matter to me. But if *you* fail you will lose your holding in this firth."

"Oh," said Sigrid, "we would risk more than that for a fair chance at Leot."

Presently the two young men set off together, and by keeping to a river-bed, and then skirting a hill, contrived to come at Longness without being seen by anybody. They reached the house about dinner-time, and saw it all lying quietly in the sun. Thormod, without hesitation, went to the front door and knocked upon it. Sigurd stood by him.

A woman came to the door and asked what they wanted. Sigurd said, "The master. Is he at home?"

"Yes, surely. He is in the hall."

"Ask him to come out and speak with us."

She went back to Leot, who was eating his dinner. "Who is it?"

"Sigurd of Cliff is there, and a man with him. They ask you to go out and speak with them."

"Who is the other?"

"I never saw him before."

"What does he look like?"

"A young man with light eyes. His hair is black and curly. A smiling man."

"Oh, he smiles, does he? That will be Thormod. Good. I come." He got up, took a spear from the wall and went to the door. He opened it suddenly and drove the spear at Thormod, who was nearest to him.

Thormod slashed at it with his axe, and turned it downwards; but it caught him in the calf of the leg, and tore a bad wound. But as Leot stooped to follow his spear-thrust Sigurd smote him in the shoulder with a sword, and shore the flesh away from the bone. Leot turned and made for the hall; Sigurd slashed at him as he went and sliced him from the thigh down to the calf. He fell, but he

was indoors, and the woman ran before him and slammed to the door.

"That will keep him quiet for a time," said Thormod. "You and I had best be trotting." He made a bad business of his trotting, though, for his left leg was stiff already. He had to stop within a few hundred yards and bind it up.

When they were down by the water Thormod told Sigurd to get away home as fast as he could and tell his mother what had been done. "I advise you to go over to Scuf for a while. Now get on with you, and leave me to shift for myself. I shall hang about the boat-house out there on the chance of getting a passage out of the firth."

He limped off cheerfully, and reached the boat-house. It was empty, but there were signs that a boat had been taken out lately. No doubt it would be home by dark. He sought out a berth for himself in dry sea-weed, made himself comfortable and slept out the rest of the day. In the dusk he was awakened by the sound of rowing, and sat up to listen to it.

It all fell out as he expected. Men brought in

a boat, and came ashore. He heard them talking about the weather and debating if the boat should be pulled up or not. They decided to risk it, and went their way home, carrying their fish and gear.

Thormod waited till it was dark, and then pulled up the stone which held the boat. He was soon out in the firth—a fine still moonlight night; but that did not trouble him.

If he had known that Thordis, the spæwoman, was having visions, he might have hurried, but I doubt it. She had a vision, nodding over the fire, and woke as usual with a start. “Where art thou, Bodwar, my son?”

“Here, mother. What do you want of me?”

“There’s fish to be taken to-night,” she says, “if you are the man to take him.”

“I am a man for any game,” said Bodwar. “But where are your fish, and what kind of fish are they?”

“Thormod the outlaw is abroad on the firth, and he is alone. Come thou with me, and we shall catch him.” Bodwar was all agog in a moment, roused up some of the men, took his weapons, and

had the party down by the boats in a very short time. They set off rowing and rowed fast. Thor-mod heard them from a long way off, and looked about to see what he had best do. There were shelves of rock scattered about the firth, but a long way from each other. These were his best chance, he thought, though bad was best. He had the boat bottom upwards in no time, and swam for the nearest shelf. It was fairly long, and covered with sea-weed. Whether the high tides covered it he had no notion. "I must be drowned or speared, it seems, and may be both. But who knows his doom?" He dug himself into a cleft in the rocks, covered himself in sea-weed, and waited.

They were long in coming, for they first found the boat, and debated about that. Thordis thought, certainly not; and it was by her directions that they landed on the rock-island, and went over it carefully with spears. Twice at least Thormod felt them, and put up a prayer to King Olaf. They passed right over him three times in all—and finally he heard Thordis calling to him. "Thormod, Thormod, come out and fight my son. If you have more

spunk than a goat, if you have a bolder heart than a mare, come out and fight." It was on the tip of his tongue to answer her—but some wiser spirit, perhaps King Olaf's, restrained him. Then, at last, he heard them go grumbling away; finally, he heard the oars. He found out afterwards that they had taken his boat with them.

He pulled himself out of the sea-weed and got into the sea. Swimming was very difficult now, for his left leg was stiff all the way up. He swam from island to island, and by resting on every one managed to make some way; but by the time the grey began to show up in the east he knew he was done. He crawled his last on to a shelf of rock, and there he lay.

Then it was, as they tell the tale, that at Wick, a homestead near at hand, the good man of the house, whose name was Grim, dreamed a dream.

He dreamed that a man in a white cloak stood by his bed. He saw him there plainly. He was a fair man, bearded, broad-shouldered, blue-eyed, not over-tall. He was leaning on a spear, and seemed to be waiting until Grim should wake up.

When Grim sat up in bed, the man asked him, "Grim, do you sleep or wake?"

"I am awake, as I believe," said Grim. "And who are you?"

"I am King Olaf, son of Harold, and I have a commandment to give you, which is this. You shall go out on to the firth and look for my poet Thor-mod, who is lying spent and wounded on a ledge of rock. He has not had fortunate travel, and will die if he is not picked up. And if you are not willing to go yourself, you have a man here who will gladly do my errand. He is a guest of yours, and calls himself Gest, but that is not his name. His name is Steinar, and he is an Ice-lander; and he is out here to avenge the death of Thorgar Hawarsson. That he cannot do, but he can succour the avenger—and so he will if you ask him." Hereupon it seemed to Grim that the figure faded into the dark, but that he himself remained, broad-awake and sitting up.

He got out of bed, put on his clothes, took his sword, and went to wake Gest.

"What is it, host?"

"Up with you. I have a word or two to say."

Gest took his sword and went out with him into the hall.

"Now," said Grim, "if it is for the first or last time, tell me your name."

"You know my name."

"I know the name which you gave me, but not whether it is truly your name."

"Why should it not be?"

"Because I believe it is Steinar."

"Who told you that?"

"It was King Olaf."

"And when did you see King Olaf?"

"A moment since." He told him what he had seen.

Gest said, "If he is right about me, he is right about Thormod. I know Thormod well, and that he has been beforehand with me in Thorgar's business. Now we must go and look for him."

They took boat and searched the islands, and presently found Thormod. "How is it with you, fellow-traveller?" said Gest.

“Poorly just now,” said Thormod, “but I left a man up at Longness poorer than me.”

“Who was that?”

“A heavy man called Leot.”

“That makes four of them?”

“Yes, four.”

“Thorgar may rest himself, I think.”

“He must make the best job he can of it,” said Thormod. “It would take me two years to get him the fifth, and Greenland would not hold me for so long.”

“You will be safe with me,” Grim said, “till your leg is whole—and then we will fit you aboard Scuf’s ship.” Then they helped him into the boat, took him home to Wick, and kept him quiet until the next Moot was over. At that Moot Sigurd was outlawed for his share in Leot’s killing, but he took that very little to heart because he was leaving Greenland with Scuf.

As soon as the Moot was over Scuf sailed for Norway.

XIX

WHEN Thormod looked in the face of King Olaf again, he did not see much friendship in it, and was dashed, because he himself felt that there was nobody in the world like his king. By and by he found out why that was, that a man had come to the court before him and given out that he had avenged Thorgar's death. On the strength of that tale he had been rewarded and taken into friendship; and when Thormod presented himself it was as one who had failed in an undertaking, who might be a good poet, but was not a man of any other account. Thormod received a nod, and was hurt. He was a careless and light-hearted soul, but capable of great worship, and even love. All the affection he had for Thorgar was now centred in the King, and to be so received was to be cut to the heart.

One day, at dinner, the King sent down the drink-

ing horn to Thormod, and called for a verse from him in return. Thormod, white and furious, started up and spoke what came to him on the spur of the moment. It stung. It was to the effect that the dream-king who stood by Grim's bed and interceded for his life was a better friend to him than this king who commanded verses. Everybody stared, and Olaf stared longest.

"Who was your dream-king, and what did he do?"

"He came to the bedside of Grim of Wick and bade him seek me where I lay wounded and spent on the reef."

"I asked you, who was he?"

"He called himself Olaf Haroldsson."

The King looked queerly at him.

"Tell me what you did in Greenland, Thormod."

"I am glad that you wish to know it." Then he recited his deeds, and the deaths of Thorgrim Troll and his nephews Falgar, Thorkel, Thord and Leot.

"But Glum tells us that he slew Thorgrim Troll——"

"Then Glum is a liar. I, the left-handed man, slew him, as I tell you."

"Well, said King Olaf, "no one can say that you have not had good luck, and more than the fisherman's luck. The fisherman reckons—a fish for himself, a fish for the boat, a fish for his hook, and a fish for his line. But you are a fish to the good."

"Yes, I am. But I left one fish in the water, and regret it."

"I see that Glum has been valiant with his mouth," said Olaf, "but you have deeds behind your words. Come up here and sit by me." So they made friends again, and Thormod began to share Olaf's counsels, which were not of good augury just then. In fact, it appeared that after reigning fifteen years over Norway, fighting, and in the main successfully fighting, against the might of King Cnut of England and Denmark, he must now, as he put it, set out on his travels again. Earl Hakon, a steady enemy of his, was now in force in the country, and to his banner the greater part of the chiefs were going over—for one reason or

another, but chiefly for this, that King Olaf had rendered Norway a country where men could live in peace and under the protection of his law. Now the chiefs had been accustomed to live, on the contrary, in war. Wickings at sea, they had also chosen to be wickings on land. As for the law, they had no use for that at all. If plunder were to be punishable under King Olaf's law—and it was punishable and impartially punished—a chief was in no better case than a pickpocket, and for all they could see there was no virtue in chiefhood at all. Earl Hakon had no such prejudice concerning justice, and his strength was increasing from day to day.

These things King Olaf confided to Thormod by degrees, and by increasing degrees as his affection for the young man grew. He had no reason to repent his confidence, for Thormod had always had a turn for devotion, and now that his dues to his murdered friend Thorgar were paid he had leisure of heart to admire and to love this great king. "Sir," he said, "it seems to me that you have not Christianised Norway by dipping all the Nor-

wegians in water, and that you will have to dip many more of them in blood before you can hope to save their souls. Now whether you are as strong as your cause deserves, I cannot say, but of this I am sure, that by going into exile for a time you will grow stronger rather than weaker. To begin with, those who follow you thither will be men on whom you can rely; second, a very short time of ill-government under Earl Hakon and the chiefs will convince the people that yours has been good government and theirs is no government at all. When you come back, you will find the Norwegians ready for you. That is what I think."

The King had his chin in his hand, and was looking at his poet. "And do you follow me if I go into exile?" he asked.

"I do," said Thormod.

"And what is your reason?"

"You are my King," said Thormod, "and I will share life and death with you. When I leapt into your ship in the harbour I put my life into your hands, and you gave it back to me. The reason I had then is the reason I have now."

“I was not your King then, my friend.”

“You were not. But I saw you throned there upon the ship of war, and a voice spoke to me and said, There, Thormod, is your King. And so it has turned out. Now I know that my life is bound with yours, and if you are willing it shall cease with yours also.”

“Ah,” said King Olaf, “who knows when his life will cease?”

“I do,” said Thormod. “I know that my life will cease when yours ceases.”

The King gave him his hand. “A few more of your sort, and I shall come back to Norway.”

“You will find plenty of my sort in Iceland,” said Thormod.

XX

KING OLAF, however, did not go West, but rather to the East, where he was certain of a welcome. His queen, Astrid, his daughter, Ulfhild, his son, Magnus, went with him; and he mustered in all some two hundred adherents, of whom there are known to this tale Fin Ernesson and Thormod the poet. There had been others, and in particular Biorn the marshal, a famous man on whom he counted. But Biorn asked leave to go home to his lands, saying that he was too old for adventure, and King Olaf had not known how to refuse him. If he were compelled to go it would have been against his will; if he stayed behind he might remain true to the King's cause. So Biorn was let off, and others fell off; but two hundred persons remained to Olaf of all his kingdom of Norway, and with these he threaded the Swedish forests and took ship for Russia. He was well received

by the King, Jarisleif, and offered a barony on which to maintain himself and his family. He took that thankfully, and there we lose sight of him for about three years.

During those years everything in Norway turned to favour Earl Hakon, who had the support of King Cnut of England, and of his money. The money, among other effects it had, seduced Biorn the marshal from his loyalty. He was tempted to swear fealty to the Earl, and he fell. But towards the end of Olaf's sojourn in Russia Earl Hakon, on a voyage home from England to Norway, was lost in a storm off the north of Caithness, he and his whole ship's company; and when news of this was brought to Biorn—that the Earl was drowned, and Norway without a lord—he felt that he had been a fool. “Who is so fit to be lord of Norway as the great King I have forsworn? Are we to see here a creature of King Cnut's; and is that mighty man to be lord of half the earth? That will not suit either Norway or me. I will seek out King Olaf, as the Prodigal Son sought out his father, and what he said that I will say.”

He arrayed himself then and there, and with a trusty retinue set out on his journey to the East. He travelled night and day, by land as well as by sea, and did not stay anywhere, or sleep in a bed, until he had come up with King Olaf. The King, who knew nothing of his defection, was glad of him and welcomed him as a friend. Having heard all his news from home, he was full of thought, but by no means decided what to do. The Russian King had offered him a province, the province of Kasan, to rule over; his people, however, were homesick; as for himself, he was tempted to renounce all worldly affairs, to go pilgrim to Jerusalem, and there settle himself a hermit. Now came this news of Norway, and he must make up his mind. "Biorn," he said, "between now and then God will decide my road for me, and not I. But tell me first of those who called themselves my friends, how many call themselves so now."

Biorn said, "It has gone differently with different men. But many are against you."

"If you cannot tell me more about them you

cannot tell me anything that I don't know," said Olaf. "Tell me at least of yourself."

Then Biorn felt that his time had come. He rose up; he said, "Sir, I am here to answer for myself." Then he grew very red in the face, and suddenly fell upon his knees, bowed his head, and took King Olaf by the foot. "Sir, Sir, I am in your hands and in God's. I am unworthy to live, for I have taken money from the King of England and sworn fealty to him—but now I renounce that service, and am yours altogether."

King Olaf nodded his head, looking down at the prostrate chief. "Stand up, Biorn, stand up, and be my friend," he said. "Make excuses to God for your false oaths, and may He be as merciful to you as I will be. I see very well that all's to do in Norway if you can be false."

Biorn kissed the King's foot before he got up from his knees. He was now sincerely repentant, and meant to do well; but King Olaf was not encouraged by his report of himself, and not at all certain what he would do. He took full time to

consider of it, consulting nobody until he had made up his own mind.

It was a dream he had in the small hours of a morning which decided him. He had slept badly, and that only in the morning hours, and so lightly that when he was awake (as he supposed) it seemed to him that he had not slept at all. A small and level grey light was over the hall where he lay. He could see all the things in the great room quietly in their places; and then presently, as his eyes ranged from one thing to another, from that to this, they fell upon a tall, grave and noble figure sitting by his bedside. This man was elderly, for his beard was grey, and his bushy eyebrows were grey too. His head was cowed, and over the cowl was a circlet of gold. Between his knees stood a long-sword, on the pommel of which were both his hands. As he looked it came into his mind that here was no other than the spirit of King Olaf Tryggvasson whom all Norway revered; but he said nothing—not because he was frightened, but out of respect to the great dead king.

Presently the dead spoke to him as follows:

“You are sick of thinking what you shall do hereafter; but it is wonderful to me that it should seem open to you to renounce the realm which God has given you, and of taking as a gift from a foreigner a kingdom where you would be a vassal. Go you back rather to the country which is your own, and rule it with your own strength and virtue. If you give it up to those who are your subjects you make yourself lower than they. It is glorious to defeat your enemies, it is glorious to die in war; but it is inglorious to fear the trial of your right. Doubt not, hide nothing, dare everything. God will declare Himself, and let His be the arbitrament, as right is.” Then the spirit rose and went down the hall. King Olaf watched him go, but heard not a sound. When he came to the door of the hall, like mist he was lost in it.

After that he would not doubt; and that very day he called an assembly and declared his purpose. But be these things as they may, they belong to the saga of King Olaf the Holy, which exists and is very worthy to be read; whereas we are only concerned with the rest of the fortunes of Thormod

the poet, whose light heart had led him to bind them up with those of his king. Let it be enough, therefore, to say that King Olaf returned the way he had come, and quartered himself for a winter with his brother-in-law the King of Sweden. At that court he collected about him some six hundred loyal Norwegians, and added to them four hundred men furnished, not very willingly, by his brother-in-law. Then came in one Dag Ringsson, a high-descended chief long exiled from Norway, whom now, by promises of the restitution of his estates, King Olaf won over to his side—him and twelve hundred men behind him. Now then, having well over two thousand men to his banner, King Olaf set out to conquer Norway or to fall.

On his way through the forest country towards the great ridge which divides Sweden from Norway many more men joined him—forest-dwellers for the most part, with some great rogues among them. Two mighty robbers, Gank-Thorer and his brother Afarfarte, came with thirty men behind them, and asked the King's leave to go with him. Fine men they were, and well-armed. The King said that

he would take them if they were Christians, but if not, not. Gank-Thorer said that he was neither a Christian nor a heathen. "I believe in myself," he said, "and in my strength. They have never failed me yet, and I shall trust in them until they do."

Said King Olaf, "I find it a pity that such a fine murdering man as yourself should not believe in Christ."

But Gank-Thorer replied that maybe if he did so believe he would not be such a good murderer. And then he said, "Show me, King, a Christian in your company who has my inches or shoulders."

"Come," said King Olaf, "into the water with you, and after me. You shall have great honour and advancement."

Afarfarte refused, and was for turning away, but his brother kept him from going. "Hold still, you fool, and let the King go forward. We will follow in the rear and get our share in the battle; and after that it is not likely he will plague us with his religion." And that was what they did.

The army climbed the ridge and looked West

over all Norway to the sea. King Olaf stood for a long time regarding it, and Thormod stood beside him, gazing with all his eyes. Both were silent, but Thormod's eyes were filled with tears, though he was very happy. King Olaf presently noticed him. "Why do you cry?" he asked.

Thormod said, "It is because it is all so beautiful, and that the things we do are shameful and pitiful at once. And also I think that a man's life might be as beautiful as that far prospect, if he did but know how to accomplish it. I am crying because it is beautiful and I can never have it."

"Why, silly one, are we not here with a great army to get it?"

"Beauty of that sort is not to be won with an army," said Thormod.

"Maybe the Kingdom of Heaven will look as fair as that," said the King; and Thormod—

"Maybe it will. But of that I know nothing, and of this much."

The army, to call it so, which was more like a horde than an army, descended the Fjeld in loose

order, but assembled at Suul, which was a farmstead in Vaerdale held by a bondsman called Thorgeir Flek, well affected to the King's party. Olaf stayed with Thorgeir all night, and in the morning early gave the signal for the march. Two of Thorgeir's sons, much against their father's will, accompanied the King. They marched to Staff, and had Staff Moor before them; there King Olaf heard that his enemies were on the march against him, and that he must adopt battle-order so as to be ready for them. The first thing he did was to muster all ranks, and the first thing that came of that was that he found nine hundred heathens under arms. He was clear that he would not have them on those terms. "Our force is small indeed without the help of God," he said, "and that I cannot expect if I mix up heathenry with my men. Now let those men be christened, or let them go home. Of two things one." The heathen held an assembly and talked the matter up and down. Four hundred would go into the water, five hundred would not. Those stiff-necked King Olaf sent away. Then he came once more upon the two

brother-murderers, Gank-Thorer and Afarfarte.

"Now are you two Christian men, or are you not?"

"We are not."

"Then you cannot come with me. I give you strict command," he said. "Go into the water, or go away."

They said they would talk of it, and that was allowed them.

"Now," said Afarfarte, "I have come so far in the prospect of a battle, and I don't intend to turn back; but I don't care two straws on which side I fight; and maybe the other side will not be so stiff about this religious affair as the King is. I am for sounding them first of all before anything else is done. What is your opinion?"

"My opinion," Gank-Thorer said, "is that I shall fight on the King's side; for a king he is, and if he win the day he will reward kingly. And as for religion, if I must believe in a God, it may be Christ as well as any other, for the odds are that all gods are but names of one God. If it will please King Olaf to have us Christians, why, let

us go into the river. There's nothing in that—and then for the battle.”

Agreed. The thing was done there and then by the King's priest, and immediately after they were confirmed by a bishop.

“Now,” said Olaf, “two such fine men as you shall have all honour from me. I appoint you my bodyguard.”

Then he ordered his forces, taking the centre himself, giving Dag Ringsson the right wing, and the Swedes the left. The Cross was to be painted on all shields and helms in white. The battle-cry was “Christ! the Cross! the King!”

He held a council of war wherein it was debated whether the army should waste the country or not. Fin Ernesson was strongly for it, and Thormod, who was present, broke into vehement song:

“Fire house and hut,
Burn steading and stall;
See the doors are shut
Till the roof-trees fall!
Then trust the sword
And let it alone
To prove the King's word
And win him his own.”

He sang that resonantly, and the chiefs made a hero of him—but King Olaf would not have it. “With fire and sword have I swept Norway aforetime—but that was reward of idolatry and sin against God. This time they have sinned against me—and what is this offence compared with that? No, I can have mercy, but God, Who is just and perfectly good, can have none. And there is another thing to be said. If I give you leave to plunder, and, loaded up to the neck with your spoils, you are beaten in the battle, what will befall you? You will be like men in shipwreck who stuff their pockets with silver and gold, and find that cork would have suited them better. But suppose you win. Then it will be as well to think of plunder, and useful to have well-filled stockyards wherein to make your profit. Take what cattle you want for your day’s ration; take and kill spies of the enemy—but spare all else, for they are my people and not yours.” And then he turned to where Thormod and the rest of his poets were standing. There were there besides Thormod, Gissur and Thorfinn Mudr. Sigvat, who was the most re-

nowned poet at the King's court, was not there then. "You poets," said the King, "have other weapons than your axes and swords, though I know that some of you can give an account of yourselves with them too. Now you shall be within my own shield-wall, that you may be free to call upon my men as they need your voices."

Thormod said to Gissur, "Don't stand too close to me, brother. Leave room for Sigvat, in case he comes up in a hurry, and the King find that he cannot do without him."

King Olaf heard that. "No need to make light of Sigvat because he is not here. He has served me well in his time, and now maybe he is serving me better. He is in Rome, I believe, and at his prayers. God knows we need them."

"Sir," said Thormod, "may God hear his prayers, and may that serve your need. But if all of us were just now saying our prayers, it would be roomy about your banner, I am thinking."

"Peace to your tongue, young man," said King Olaf. "You are never without an answer."

XXI

THE army marched down to Sticklestead and encamped there for the night. It was known that the enemy was close at hand. "To-morrow will settle affairs between us," the King said.

He ate his supper in a tent which had been put up for him, and was himself much as usual, confident, plain-spoken and cheerful. But he noticed that Thormod was very glum, and kept him back when the rest of the company retired, in order to comfort him.

"What is the matter with you, poet? Why are you without a word among us?"

Thormod muttered something inaudible, and then declared himself in a rush. "It is because I don't know how it will be to-morrow—whether you will keep troth with me or not."

“What do you wish me to do for you?”

“To keep your promise that we have the same quarters to-morrow night as to-night.”

The King smiled at him. “My lad, it may be that I shall not have the ordering of our quarters to-morrow night—but so far as I am able I promise you that we shall share whatever lodging may be assigned to me.”

Their eyes met, and the young man's face was lit all over by a smile. “Why, then, I shall do well,” he said. “Now I am ready for the Spear-Moot with you, and no fumbling about it. Trust me to be at hand whether the other poets are here or not.”

King Olaf nodded his head and smiled upon him. “I know that you have been faithful to me in life, and so will I be to you. But it may be that I shall lose my life in this battle.”

“Then it is certain that I shall lose mine too,” said Thormod. “I have cast my mind back over the deeds of my life, and I don't know a better thing that ever I did than when I leapt into your

ship. I have served Thorgar, who was my sworn-brother, and have killed more men for his account than I have for yours. But wait a little till to-morrow's bill be cast. Then my score for you may be higher than it was for Thorgar."

"How old are you?" says the King. "And how many men have you killed in fight?"

"I am thirty-five, and I think that I have been the death of ten men at least—and there may be more."

"You are not very old yet," says King Olaf, "and much purgatory will not be asked of you, I daresay. Yet there must be allowed a twelve hours for each of your dead men, and after that I engage you will have ease."

"It will be little ease to me if I am not with you," said Thormod.

"I shall be there," said King Olaf.

He lay down on his bed, and Thormod, with no leave asked, covered himself with his cloak and lay on the floor. He was soon asleep; but the King

could not sleep at all until near dawn, and even so he awoke with the early light.

He lay for a time thinking of life past and to come, in a state of strange calm, seeing that he had a clear vision of what the day was to bring him. He saw Thormod on the floor of the tent, deeply asleep, and had a kind thought for him. "There are not many like him about me now," he thought. "He is very little of a Christian, but very much of a man." Then he called to him gently, "Thormod, Thormod."

Thormod opened his eyes in a moment, then sat up. "Did you call me?"

"Yes. It is yet very early, but we had better be stirring. Do you awaken the host with a song."

Thormod rose to his feet and went to the door of the tent. He looked out. The sun was burning the mountain-tops. "It is not very early," he said, and as he said so he was thinking of what he would sing. Then he began the old Lay of Bearse, who had been a mighty hero of modern times. So loud he sang that the whole army heard him and knew what he was singing.

“The day is breaking,
The house-cock shaking
His rustling wings;
The priest-bell rings
To cry the morn;
The sounding horn
Calls up the thralls to work and to weep.

“Now, sons of Adil, cast off sleep!
Wake up, wake up,
No wassail cup
Nor maiden’s cheer
Awaits you here;
Wake, Rolf of the bow,
Wake, Hare, to your blow;
Up in your might, the day is breaking,
’Tis Hildr’s game that waits your waking!”¹

It was fine to see on all sides armed men rise up in the heath and shake their spears in the air. Many of them came about the singer in the tent-door and thanked him for the song. “The house-carles’ whet,” they called it. King Olaf was much pleased. He held out to Thormod a gold arm-ring. “Here’s for the song—a brave one.”

Thormod thanked him. “Sigvat prays for you, and I sing. Each of us does what he is fitted for. But now I will do better than he, it may be, for I shall fight for you. To you, Sir, I say, remember

¹ The translation is Samuel Laing’s (*Sea-Kings of Norway*, II, 314).

your promise that we go to the same quarters this evening."

"So we shall, if we both leave Sticklestead alive."

"We will leave it, alive or dead," said Thormod.

Now they arrayed the battle, and stood facing each other for a space of time. It was a clear and fine day, promising great heat. King Olaf, looking to right and left of him, could not see Dag Ringsson and his men, though the Swedes were there on the left wing. In front of him was a host twice the size of his own, but, as he judged, undisciplined and likely to be ill-led. He let it be known to the Swedes that he should advance his banner at once, and look to them to support him should he be checked. Then, looking about him, he lifted up his sword by the point, and cried aloud, "Advance, men of the Cross!" The whole of his bodyguard swept down the slope, and met and were swallowed up in the ranks of the bondsmen.

At the first onset the bondsmen were thrown back and there was great confusion; but their num-

bers were such that the wings overlapped and enfolded the King's small force. The Swedes, who were languid fighters at all times, were slow in support, and there was serious danger that the King's army might be destroyed in detail. Dag Ringsson on his right was just in time to prevent this; but on his left King Olaf's flank was turned. The fighting was now hand-to-hand, such as Northmen love, and there was neither time nor place in which to see who lived or who fell. As a fact, the two great robbers, Gank-Thorer and Afarfarte, fell in the first charge, while the King himself and all of his household behind the shield-wall were untouched. But now that the enemy had closed about them on all sides, the King's itch for fighting irked him, and he said to Thormod, "Stay you within the wall, but I am going through them if I can."

"I shall go with you," Thormod said, and followed him. He was unarmed about the body, and had no weapon with him but his notable axe of his own contrivance. But he was far beyond noticing such things, and beside the King and Fin Ernesson mowed a swathe through the host, as if

he was cutting meadow-grass. Great men fell on both sides. Thorgeir of Quitstead, a leader of the bondsmen, was one; Thord, the King's banner-bearer, was another. By this time the sun was veiled, and a heavy darkness began and grew denser and denser; and so it remained for the rest of the day.

Now, as he hewed his way, King Olaf with his bodyguard came to a knoll in the ground where stood the chief of his enemies, Kalf Arnesson and Thorer the Dog. Of all men in the world King Olaf hated Thorer, and he hewed at him as if he hated him. But the sword turned aside; it was as if he did but beat the dust out of him. Time and again he slashed at him—but without profit. So then he turned to see who was beside him, and saw it was old Biorn the marshal. "Kill me that dog," he said, and the marshal hewed at him with his axe. The axe did not wound him, but the blow knocked him down. At that moment the King had slain Olaf Arnesson, and as he fell Thorer the Dog drove his spear clean through Biorn, and cried out, "That is how we kill the bear." Just then Thor-

stein Knarsmead struck the King with an axe upon the left thigh—a grim wound. Fin killed him outright—but the King could hardly stand, and had to draw off for a while, using his sword for a walking-stick. Thorer the Dog sprang after him and drove his spear into his back. Then came on Kalf Arnesson and hit him in the neck with an axe. Those were his death-wounds. He fell on his face, and the battle rolled over him. But as soon as he found opportunity Thorer the Dog came back to where the King had fallen, and laid the body out fairly and straight, and covered it with a cloak. He wiped the blood away from his face and closed his eyes. Very noble he looked, still ruddy-cheeked, and at peace, as if he was asleep. Thorer said afterwards that the King's blood ran up between his fingers to a wound of his own upon the forearm—which wound healed of itself without need of any bandaging.

The battle had by this time rolled off to the King's right, where Dag Ringsson was pressing the enemy hard. Thormod, who had been wounded in the shoulder, did not know that the King was dead,

and followed the lead of Fin Ernesson to support Dag. By the time he came up with the fighting it was so dark that no more could be done. Each side was drawing off and making ready to spend the night on the hillside. Then came a man by Thormod, who knew him, and told him the news. Thormod stared at him stupidly. "He is dead?"

"Yes, yes, he is dead, with three great wounds on him."

Thormod sat down. "Then he has used me ill—for I am alive."

"You won't be alive very long if you stay here," the man said. Arrows were shrilling overhead. Thormod waved him off, and sat on.

"King Olaf," he said, "wherever you may be, do you mean to forsake me now? Did you not promise me that you would not cast me off? Have you forgotten me?"

An arrow struck him in the dark. He heard it come, he felt it pierce his side. Then he felt nothing more than a little throbbing in his side. "That was a good draw of somebody's. Now I know that it shall all be as I wished for it." He

stood up and felt the arrow. The head was buried. He broke off the shaft close to the skin.

He heard a wounded man calling through the dark. "Is there any here will crack a joke with me? Many a man can die laughing, and so I would. But who can laugh by himself?"

Another answered him from near at hand. "Ill have you fared, because you have done ill this day," this man said. "Is that nothing to you?"

"Who are you to scold me?" said the first.

"You may call me Heming. And who may yourself be?"

"My name is Hearrand, and I had a son of your name, whom I loved."

"And I have a father called Hearrand, and have no love for him at all, since he has done ill by the King."

"Is that my son Heming? Nay, but I have done amiss, and now I know it. But come over to me, my son, and let me see where thou art hurt."

"I'll not come," said Heming; "I'll not mix my blood with the blood of traitors. But come you

here to die. Maybe the blood of the King's men will recommend you where you are going."

"Tell me what thy hurt is, my son," says Hearrand.

"I cannot. I only know that I am on my knees because the dead are too thick to let me down; but my guts, I believe, are in the heather. And how's yourself, father?"

"I have a spear through me," said Hearrand, "and can't get it out."

Thormod lifted him and dragged him to where his son was. He left them together, and wandered off.

He now felt light-headed and empty, as though there was nothing at all in his body. But he had no pain, and was perfectly quiet and easy in his mind. Men carrying wounded went past him, and he followed their lead, which brought him to some farm buildings in the byres of which they were laying their burdens. He went to the door of a barn and leaned against the door-post, feeling very sick. Idly in his mind he wondered why he bled so little; then thought that the head of the arrow

might stop the outflow. Likely he was bleeding internally. "I must be as full as a black-pudding," he thought.

A man stood by him and began to talk to him. "You were in the battle, I suppose?"

"Yes, I was there."

"On which side were you?"

"On that which had the better."

"Nay, then, that won't carry, that word." He was looking at the gold arm-ring which Thormod wore. "That is a King's gift. It is easy to see you were a King's man. Give me that ring. I'll hide it for you, and then you will be safe with the rest. Are you wounded?"

"Oh, a scratch," said Thormod. "You can have the ring if you want it. It makes little odds to me now."

The man held out his hand, and Thormod with a quick slash of his axe took it off at the wrist.

"Hey, you have cut off my hand!"

"It is so that you should steal no more with it," said Thormod, and turned away his eyes from him.

Then came out a young woman with a kettle and saw him. She stopped. "You look very sick."

"I am sick enough," said Thormod.

"Are you a King's man?"

"I was. But they have killed him."

"Will you have your wound dressed?"

"It is a small wound for a dressing—but as you will."

She went away and came back to him with some hot milk, which he refused, saying it was not worth while. Then she felt for the iron, and tried to move it, but could not. Thormod watched her languidly. "Get your knife," he said, "get your knife and cut down to the iron. Then I can get a good hold with the pincers."

With a sharp knife she made a cut across the wound, and touched the iron with it. Thormod, still leaning to his door-post, took the ring off his arm and gave it to her. "King Olaf gave me that this morning for a song," he said. Then he took the pincers from her, and himself fixed them about the iron of the arrow. "Now for it," he said, and

wrenched it out. Black and curdled blood gushed after it; then red blood flowed freely.

Thormod was looking at the barb, held by the pincers' claws. "The King has fed us well," he said. "There's a co-coat of fat about the root of my heart." As she looked at him she saw his eyes fix and glaze. His head dropped forward, and then he fell. Thormod was dead.

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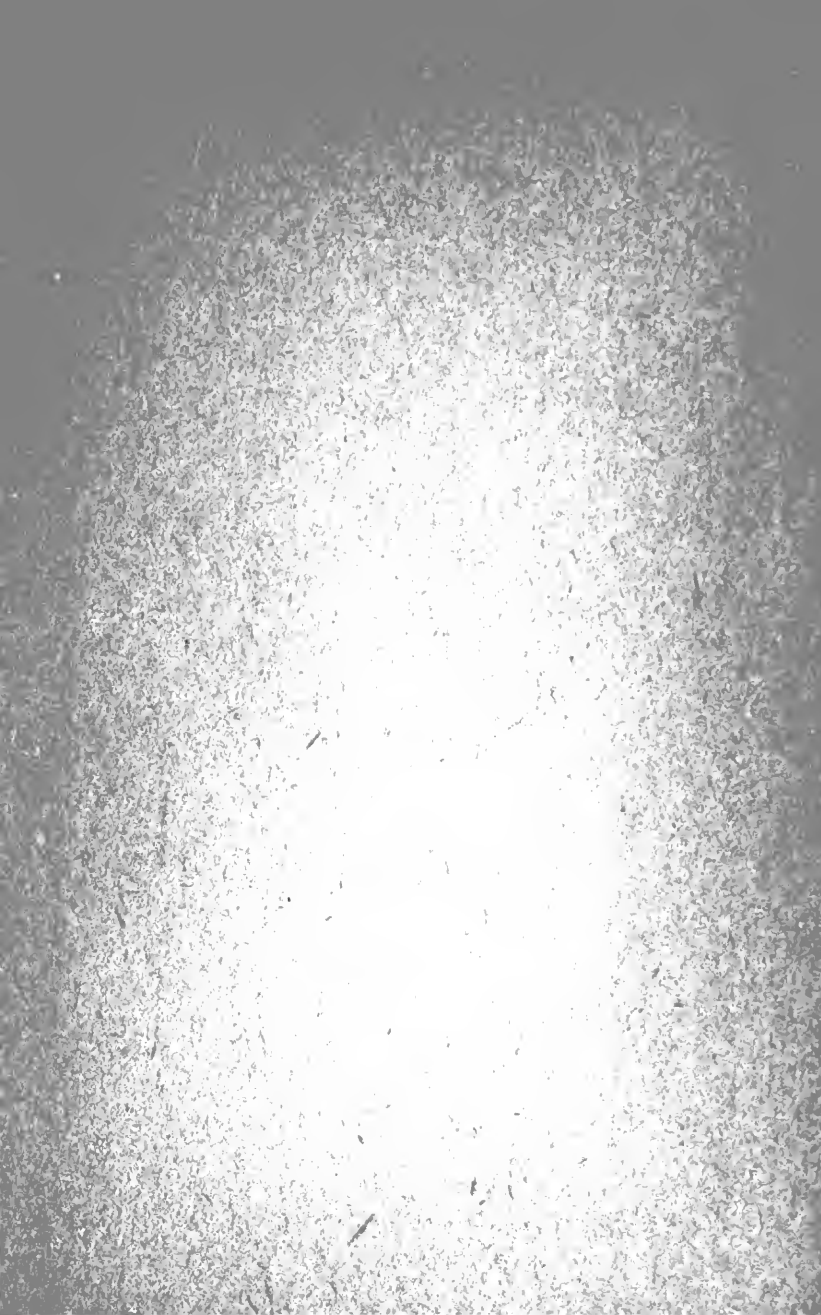
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